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A Window to the Nation A Welcome to the World

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FEBRUARY 2013

Snake's Sweeping Soiree

A Breath of Foul Air Fond Farewells



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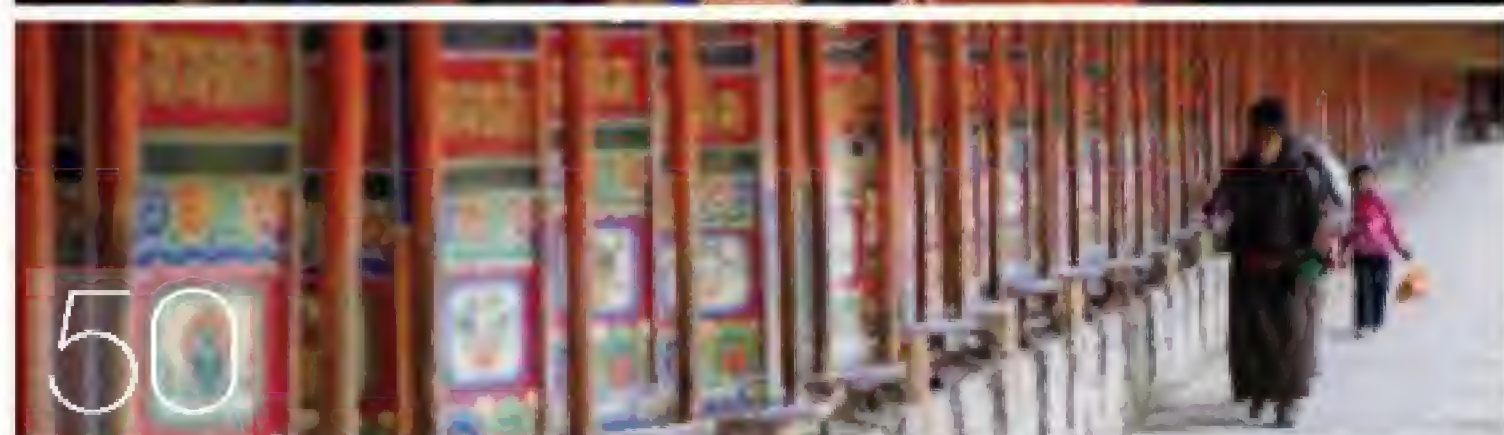
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Comments



During Spring Festival travel season, seatless passengers crowd the aisle between train carriages. CFP



A domestic LCD television production line. Foreign LCD suppliers including Samsung and LG now dominate China's LCD market. /C

Train Ticket Pricing

With the arrival of the Spring Festival travel season, train ticket pricing has again become a hot topic. Someone posted a microblog to call for "seatless tickets cut to half price," which garnered support from 80 percent of netizens. It is against the principles of fair play that currently seats and standing-room-only tickets are sold at the same price. An economic belief holds that market naturally determines the price. Letting the market determine train prices requires the country's railway department to transform from an administrator to a market player. After reform, not only will the prices of seatless tickets drop, but prices for various classes and times will become adjustable and negotiable, and such flexible pricing will benefit all passengers – regardless of income and social class.

(Xu Lifan, Chinadaily.com.cn)

LCD Fines

On January 4, 2013, the National Development and Reform Commission of China announced penalties of 353 million yuan levied on six international LCD screen suppliers including Samsung and LG for anti-trust charges and price fixing. The settlement is considered the biggest fine China ever imposed on foreign firms. Before this, the United States levied penalties of more than \$1.2 billion on the six companies and punished nine executives involved.

Free competition is considered the soul of the market economy. After the opening of the Chinese market, various foreign investors have flooded the country. Multinational enterprises commonly dominate fields ranging from chemicals and food to electronics, and manipulate market prices through slowing production and price fixing. Some of their products are sold at extremely high prices in China. The 353-million-yuan penalty indicates that China has begun to say "no" to monopolies.

(Lian Hongyang, Dayang.com)



A traffic light on Beijing's Chang'an Avenue. China's newly enacted traffic rules add penalties for running a yellow light. CFP

Yellow Light Rules

China's strictest-ever traffic regulations were enacted on January 1, 2013, which added a penalty for running a yellow traffic light. Some drivers have complained they can't stop fast enough when the light turns yellow unexpectedly, and that sudden braking can result in accidents.

As China is becoming a "society on wheels," its people lag behind in driving etiquette. When the light turns yellow, some drivers don't attempt to stop at the intersection, but speed up to make it, which frequently causes accidents. Perhaps the debate on the new traffic rules won't fade until drivers get used to slowing for a yellow light. Of course, traffic administration departments should also improve traffic light timing to ensure drivers have time to react when it changes.

(Tao Duanfang, *The Beijing News*)

National Health Report Debate

The National Health Report released by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) on January 8, 2013, ranked China's national health index 11th of 100 countries sampled, and predicted the country to surpass the United States in every respect by 2049. However, the ambitious predictions of the report were met with doubt and mockery rather than applause from netizens.

The primary reason is that the bright future described in the CAS report sharply contrasts realities of modern China. In an era of fast transformation, China now suffers from many problems, such as wealth polarization and environmental pollution. For this reason, some criticized the report as "baseless and complete nonsense." The key to solving problems is to stop empty talk that may lead the country astray, and rather stay devoted to hard work that can rejuvenate the nation.

(Wu Lian, People.com.cn)

Buzzwords



January 13, 2013: A girl breathes through tubes linking to two balloons in air-polluted Beijing. That day, several environment activists used artistic photography to bring public attention to the pollution issue. CFP

Exploded Meter

(“爆表”)

The phrase “exploded meter” refers to a measurement beyond the maximum a gauge can show. On January 13, 2013, several Chinese cities suffered severe air pollution, of which Beijing and Tianjin faced the worst. By 1 p.m. on that day, 16 of Beijing's 35 air monitoring stations showed PM2.5 index surpassing 500, the maximum that their meters could display.

Four Dishes, One Soup

(“四菜一汤”)

During his inspection tour to Hebei Province before the 2013 New Year's Day, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, strictly practiced the dining standard of “four dishes and one soup,” and conspicuously forbade wine to be served. Currently, many subordinate officials use public money to treat visiting senior officials to luxurious banquets. Large expenditures for official receptions have become deeply detested by the public. In this context, the example set by the Party's new central leadership was widely praised.

Naked Admission

(“裸考”)

The phrase “naked admission” refers to students admitted to universities purely on exam scores without any other factors taken into consideration. In China, some students can score extra points for exceptional talent in some realms. However, such a method is criticized for subjectivity and even tied to corruption. Meanwhile, students must enroll in extensive exam courses that can produce extra points for fear of falling behind peers. Many have called for reform of the enrollment system to achieve educational fairness.

People



Xu Zheng promotes *Lost in Thailand* in Shanghai. CFP

Xu Zheng

Renowned Shanghai actor Xu Zheng directed and starred in the comedy film *Lost in Thailand*. At the end of 2012, the film premiered on the Chinese mainland. In just three weeks, the low-budget hit steamrolled the competition to become the highest-grossing mainland film ever and the first domestic production to eclipse the one-billion-yuan mark at the box office, attracting more than 30 million spectators. To date, the movie has earned more than 1.2 billion yuan at box office. "I hope spectators appreciate our efforts to inject quality into low-budget film," added Xu.

Li Na

The 2012 list of wealthiest Chinese athletes was recently released, with annual income of at least five million yuan as the threshold. Tennis player Li Na topped it with 112 million yuan, followed by hurdler Liu Xiang and swimmer Sun Yang. Of the 35 athletes on the list, 19 are engaged in international mainstream professional sports, including football, basketball, tennis, golf, and snooker.

Yuan Lihai

On January 4, 2013, seven children died and many others were injured in a fire that broke out in a private orphanage in Lankao County, central China's Henan Province.

The blaze engulfed the house where 48-year-old local Yuan Lihai looked after abandoned children and orphans she took in over the years. In 1987, Yuan took in her first baby: a boy born with a harelip. Since then, she has cared for more than 100 abandoned children and orphans. After the fire, Yuan was not only investigated by police, but also questioned by media about her motivations for caring for so many children. Some people criticized Lankao for its lack of a public orphanage and the local government's avoidance of that responsibility. Yuan declared that she would stop taking in any children if they have somewhere else to go, but if "the government does nothing, I will continue doing what I used to do. I just cannot bear to see young lives lost."



Yuan Lihai and an albino child she took in. CFP

January 24, 2013:
Li Na advances
to the final round
of the Australian
Open. CFP



MoMo Wu is referred to as "China's Lady Gaga" by her fans. CFP

MoMo Wu

Momo Wu (Wu Mochou) was born in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province. The 21-year-old girl has drawn major public and media attention for her stylish performances on the TV show "The Voice of China" in the summer of 2012. Often compared to Lady Gaga, the emerging pop singer's career has developed fast. In just a few months since the conclusion of "The Voice of China," Wu has graced the pages of many renowned magazines such as *ELLE*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Psychologies*.

In January 2013, she topped a list of 2012's "50 most beautiful new artists in the world" compiled by a Chinese media outlet.

Quotes



"Nowadays, many young people complain that their generation is the most unlucky and pathetic. However, every generation of youth endures hardship. Every generation has its own struggles and fights, and every generation needs to make its own decisions."

— Bai Yansong, commentator and China Central Television (CCTV) anchor addressing common complaints from the youth.



"The tendency over the past several years has considered development important and down-to-earth. Focusing on reform may offend people, especially those with vested interests. So, some officials are reluctant to reform. If this situation doesn't change, it will only become harder to deepen reform."

— Economist Zhang Zuoyuan emphasizing that China should rethink reform and grasp its true meaning.



"Three centers have emerged in the world: The center of the financial crisis is in Europe, the center of global turbulence and regional wars is the Middle East, and the center for global economic growth is East Asia."

— Wu Jianmin, former President of China Foreign Affairs University, believes China still faces many challenges and opportunities. The next ten years is crucial for the country.



"Fair and equal treatment can propel entrepreneurs towards a better sense of responsibility and bring their initiative into full play. By doing this, they will not leave for foreign lands to become second-class citizens, but reinvest their earnings in their motherland."

— Zong Qinghou, chairman of Hangzhou Wahaha Group, China's top beverage company, believes that only after China's investment environment improves will profits grow and enterprises develop better.



"I want to express my sincere thanks to all the readers who queued up in chilly winds for hours yesterday to show their support for me and my book. I know you did this not because I am a 'literary master,' but because I speak truth in a fascinating and lively way. I have fears, too. But a writer's value lies in his courage to conquer fear and speak the unknown."

— Li Chengpeng, an online opinion leader. He expressed his thanks on Weibo to readers who came to Beijing's Zhongguancun Book Building to attend a signing of his new book *The Whole World Knows*.



Qingxiu Mountain scenic zone witnesses a large tourist boost around Spring Festival. CFP

Nanning's Pagoda Mountain

When traveling in China during the winter season, Nanning in Guangxi is a good choice. With a subtropical monsoon climate, the city gets plenty of sunshine year-round. Even in January, the coldest month in a year, the average temperature sits at about 13 degrees Celsius. About 10 kilometers southeast of Nanning, the evergreen Qingxiu Mountain scenic zone is comprised of 18 hills, covering a total area of 4.07 square kilometers sated with rolling mountains and lush trees. The symbol of the scenic zone, nine-story Qingshan Pagoda was first constructed next to the river during the reign of Emperor Wanli (1573 – 1620) of the Ming Dynasty.



Ice sculpture is one of the major attractions for tourists visiting the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival. by Wang Jianwei/Xinhua

Harbin Ice Festival

The 29th Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival kicked off on January 5, 2013. By far the largest such exhibition in the world, the event attracts tourists from all over the world to experience a blend of stunning nature and amazing artwork.

The International Ice Sculpture Competition is one of the earliest and major events of the Ice and Snow Festival. This year's event has attracted competitors from dozens of countries and from all walks of life, including painters and decorators. Along with the competition, visitors enjoy massive ice sculptures in the Ice and Snow World theme park.



Bar-headed geese spending winter at Caohai Lake. CFP



Avian Winter Home

Caohai Lake, a state-level natural reserve located in the western suburbs of Weining County, is the largest highland wetland in Guizhou Province. Covering an aquatic area of more than 30 square kilometers, the lake is the largest winter destination for migratory birds in southwestern China.

A paradise for bird watchers, the lake serves as winter home to more than 180 species, including 70 rare breeds, such as the black-necked crane, black stork, and hooded crane. The lake offers particularly wonderful views between December and late March, when over 100,000 birds fly from around the world to spend their winter there.

A Breath of Foul Air


Text by Cheng Yu

Beijing's second weekend of 2013 brought the inception of many phrases to make fun of the heavy smog engulfing the capital in recent days, such as "hand-in-hand, but can't see your face." The jokes bring a lighter side to the helplessness and suffering the public felt during the recent disastrous pollution.

From January 10 to 15, density of PM2.5 particles (those 2.5 microns or smaller that can damage the lungs) reached 1,000 micrograms per cubic meter in several Beijing districts. The capital was not alone. Nearly half of China's cities were plagued with heavy air pollution and several smoggy days, which resulted in poor visibility for drivers, hospital emergency rooms packed



January 12, 2013: A heavy haze hits most of central and eastern China. /C



with patients suffering from respiratory ailments, and empty store shelves where face masks and air purifiers are normally sold.

“The pollution density reached levels normally caused by a sandstorm but with more complicated chemical elements, which makes it more harmful to human health,” revealed Wang Yuesi, researcher with the Institute of Atmospheric Physics under the

Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Coal emissions and vehicle exhaust played major roles in the pollution, but weather conditions from January 10 to 13 – light wind, a warm front, and heavy fog – all coincided at the same moment to create the severe pollution event, according to Zhang Dawei, director of Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection



January 12, 2013: Tian'anmen Gate in the smog. CFP



January 1, 2013: Tian'anmen Gate on a clear day. CFP



Environmental volunteers try to raise the environmental awareness of the public through artistic photography. CFP



January 14, 2013: Smokestacks in Wangjing District, Beijing. Excessive emissions are considered the main cause of the haze by some experts. CFP

Monitoring Center. Also, Zhang added, pollutants from neighboring cities contributed to the capital's bad air.

Governments of every level in China began to take action to address the heavy haze engulfing the cities. In Beijing, 58 factories producing building materials, metallurgy and chemicals stopped operating, and 41 more cut their emissions by 30 percent. Work at 28 construction sites that raise dust, such as leveling land, were also halted. Up to 30 percent of government vehicles were banned from roads on heavily polluted days. Drivers breaking the rules faced harsh penalties.


The environmental protection office of Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, began to consider new mechanisms to combat severely polluted days by limiting the number of cars on the road through the odd and even license plate number rule. Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei Province, ordered 30 percent of its government vehicles to get off the roads.

Along with the temporary measures, related departments and experts converged to discuss improving the environment through the joint efforts of several cities and regions. In recent years, efforts such as switching coal to gas and relocating factories have helped cut emissions dramatically in Beijing's city proper. But pollution in the city's rural areas remains serious and coal emissions from neighboring Hebei Province and Tianjin Municipality far exceed



January 14, 2013: Face masks are sold out in a supermarket. JC

Beijing. Ma Jun, director of the Beijing Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, declared that the time has come to establish a regional joint mechanism to control various contaminants.

The thick smog also inspired many victims to reexamine their own lifestyles. Some green organizations are pleading for the public to drive less, use fewer plastic bags and disposable items, sort trash and shop less. 



Snake's Sweeping Soiree

Conceived and edited by Li Xia, Wen Zhihong, Liu Haile, and Zhao Yue

Credited "Features" photos are courtesy of the photo exhibition, China in Celebration of the Spring Festival, jointly sponsored by the Chinese Photographers Society and Foreign Affairs Bureau under the Ministry of Culture

China's biggest holiday, Spring Festival (or Chinese New Year), started on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, January 19, 2013. After that date, millions of people began heading home for New Year's Eve to meet family for a reunion dinner. For thousands of years, Chinese New Year has been the period people bid farewell to the past year and welcome the new, pay homage to their ancestors, socialize with relatives and friends, and pray for prosperity. Their remembrance, gratitude, and aspirations are embodied in colorful folk celebrations which last weeks.



Lion dancing is a special folk performance popular in South China during the Spring Festival. *by Li Yanming*



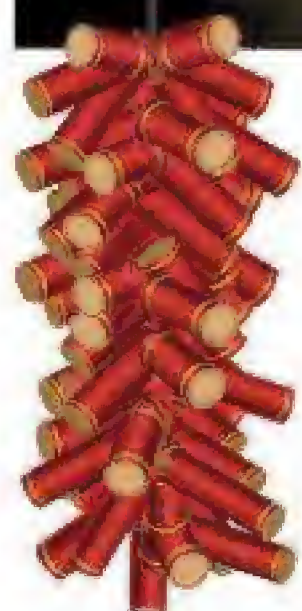
During Spring Festival, yangko dance troupes travel to the countryside of Jilin Province to bring joy and New Year greetings to rural residents. *by Han Yuchang*





Villagers in "Hua'e Tower", an earthen Hakka tower in Guangdong, hold a grand ceremony to pray for good luck in the New Year. *by Huang Junying*





A Family Festival

Text by Ni Junchen

The eighth day of the twelfth month on the Chinese lunar calendar on January 19, 2013, kicked off the biggest holiday in the country. Atop millions of breakfast tables are rice porridge with nuts and dried

fruit. People welcome Spring Festival by worshipping the kitchen god, thoroughly cleaning the house, laundering clothing to get rid of bad luck, posting antithetical couplets, cooking loads of food, and purchasing new clothes.



A ritual to worship ancestors. *by Liu Tianxing*



Steam rises from a small courtyard during Spring Festival. *by Wang Huaping*

Over the last few years, China has seen a rapid economic development and increasing cultural exchange with Western countries. More Chinese festivals are becoming recognized overseas. Nevertheless, Westerners' most common introduction to the spirit of the ancient Chinese culture via TV programs displaying dragon dances or decorative lanterns and streamers doesn't do the holiday justice. One of the most

amazing social phenomena in the history of mankind occurs annually when almost all Chinese people travel simultaneously and the entire country seems to stop working at the same moment.

This is tradition. It is the moment people bid farewell to the past year and welcome the new, pay homage to their ancestors, socialize with relatives and friends, and pray for prosperity.

Among the many customs, the most typical is worshipping gods. The 23rd day of the twelfth month marks "Xiaonian," or pre-New Year, when people offer candies to the Kitchen God, hoping he will speak kindly of them to the Jade Emperor. When the bell of the New Year rings, people welcome the gods with booming fireworks. Of the many gods, the God of Fortune, the most "adorable," receives



Preparing the flavor of the festival. *by Wang Jianping*

special worship on the 5th day of the first lunar month.

New Year's Eve dinner is the most important and biggest meal of the year to reunite the family and honor ancestors. In many places families still start dinner by placing food in front of memorial tablets on the table and "inviting" their ancestors home. Today, many families have New Year's Eve dinner in a restaurant, but they still won't begin eating before cherishing memories of their lost family members. The awareness of bloodlines and family is thus reinforced.

For children, one of the most exciting characteristics of the holiday is that parents allow them to play as long as they like, even all night. It is still common to stay up late or all night on New Year's Eve. Doing so is believed to bring longevity to one's parents and elderly relatives.

During the week-long holiday, every elder gives youngsters who visit on New Year's Day a small amount of money in a red envelope to bring blessings. This tradition has been well-preserved not only on China's mainland but continues to be practiced in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan

as well as Chinese communities overseas. After decades of economic development, the expectations for monetary gifts have also increased heavily. In big and medium-sized municipalities, the sum is at least 200 yuan (about US\$30).

Paying a New Year visit has become an important means of communication for relatives, friends, and neighbors. It is also a major driver of social communication. In most places, the wife stays with her husband's family on New Year's Eve and Day and returns to her parent's home on the second day of the new year. People begin



Spring Festival is the most exciting time of year for children because they receive new clothes and get to play as long as they want. *by Han Yuchang*



A new haircut for the new year. *by Zhou Wen*



Playing in the snow. *by Chen Yongping*



Dragon dance is a way to pray for good fortune in the new year. *by Zhu Jianxing*




January 27, 2012, the 5th day of the fifth lunar month: A God of Fortune character attracts those seeking a prosperous new year, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. CFP

to visit friends from the third day on.

The closing and most fun piece of the festival falls on the 15th day, known as Lantern Festival. In ancient times, girls were urged to go out for fun or a date on

this day, and everyone admired lanterns and ate sweet dumplings. The close of the festival was considered a carefree “carnival” for the normally very restrained Chinese people.

On the second day of the second lunar month, millions mark the dawn of spring by plowing and sowing, and as farmers return to work, the biggest celebrations of the year wind down. 

A foreigner adopts the festive spirit of Spring Festival 2012 at a temple fair at Beijing's Temple of Earth. CFP



A traditional mask at the fair held at the Temple of Earth. CFP





Cultural Icons of Spring Festival

Text by Zi Mo

As the most traditional festival of the Chinese nation that has been passed down for millennia, Spring Festival has developed various cultural icons with distinctive tones and auspicious symbolism, such as New Year pictures, paper-cuttings for window decoration, Spring Festival couplets, firecrackers, dinner on Chinese New Year's Eve, and red envelopes of lucky money for children. These cultural icons are at the heart of the festivities.



New Year Pictures

Before the arrival of Spring Festival, Chinese people, especially residents of rural areas, paste brightly-colored New Year pictures on doors and interior walls of their houses. Traditional New Year pictures are woodblock prints. Today, they have been largely replaced by mass-produced pictures in some areas. Nevertheless, traditional woodblock prints remain one of the most representative genres of folk art in China.



Paper-Cuttings for Window Decoration

In the past, residents across the country decorated their windows with paper-cuttings during Spring Festival. Today, the tradition is most prevalent in rural areas of North China. Paper cuts involve diverse subject matter, of which the most popular are flowers, animals, and other symbols for luck and good wishes.

Lucky Money

As the young greet elders during Spring Festival, they will receive red packets containing money in return, which represent a prayer for children's safety in the coming year.





Firecrackers


The tradition of lighting firecrackers to celebrate Spring Festival can be traced back more than 2,000 years. At midnight of Chinese New Year's Eve, many people light off long strings of firecrackers to welcome the New Year.

Spring Festival Couplets

Spring Festival couplets originated from "peach wood charms," long, rectangular peach boards hung on each side of gates in ancient times, carrying names of gods capable of dispelling evil in Chinese mythology. Later, paper replaced the boards and the couplets evolved into prayers for blessings. In many regions of China, people begin to paste the couplets the day before Chinese New Year's Eve.



New Year's Eve Dinner

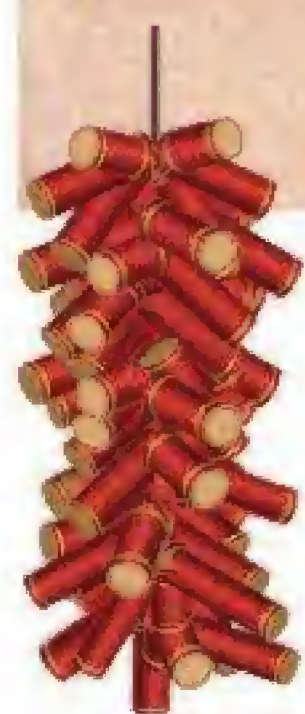
According to Chinese tradition, all family members should dine together on Chinese New Year's Eve. Symbolic dishes at the family dinner vary according to region. The staples of Spring Festival dinner in North China are dumplings called "jiaozi," which sounds like "turning of the year." Residents in the South eat another kind of dumpling made of glutinous rice, which symbolizes "reunion." Wherever they live, every household serves a fish on Chinese New Year's Eve, hoping it brings "plenty and surplus in the coming year." In the past, poor families that couldn't afford a fish and those living far from water used a wooden fish as a substitute at dinner. 



Spring Festival
magazinesdownload.com



A painting depicts how Chinese people exchanged New Year greetings in ancient times. CFP



New Year Greetings

Text by Zi Mo

As the 2013 Spring Festival draws near, Sina Weibo, China's most popular micro-blog platform, has launched a special channel for users to post New Year greetings. In the "micro age," increasing numbers of Chinese people have expressed their feelings about the upcoming Year of the Snake and spread greetings through

Weibo, while others use Weixin (a voice messaging app) to send voice greetings.

Methods Chinese people use to exchange New Year greetings continuously evolve with the advancement of information technology. However, traditional face-to-face communication remains the most direct way to wish goodwill for the upcoming Chinese New Year.

Liu Yuhang, born in the 1970s, moved to Beijing from a rural village in eastern China's Shandong Province a decade ago. He still remembers as a child going door-to-door to greet elderly neighbors early on the morning of Chinese New Year's Day.

At about 4 a.m., after eating dumplings with his family and lighting firecrackers to welcome the New Year, he began visit-

ing clan elders along with his siblings. The young dropped to their knees to show respect to the elders, and received red envelopes full of money or candy in return. “Almost every day during the two weeks of Spring Festival, my parents and I visited our relatives to chat and eat together. Some even received several groups of visitors in a single day. Those sweet scenes of family reunions remain fresh in my memory.”

In recent years, more and more youngsters are leaving their hometowns and moving to cities. Although the custom of going door-to-door to greet elders on Chinese New Year’s Day is still practiced in Liu’s hometown, children don’t even kneel any more. Liu is unsure whether the New Year greeting tradition will survive the next generation.


Currently, the tradition of children and employees begging for *lishi* (literally “lucky money”) from their elders and employers on Chinese New Year is still practiced by residents of Hong Kong and Macao. “I wish you good fortune, now

hand over the red packet!” accompanied by a sly grin is often heard on New Year greeting occasions. The givers hope that their generosity will bring good fortune in the coming year.

As a mobile communication technology emerging in the beginning of the 21st Century, text messages are the major method to send New Year greetings in China. Statistics show that Chinese people sent more than 30 billion greeting messages through SMS during 2012 Spring Festival.

Savvy senders customize the message content depending on its intended recipient. Typically, a text message to a respected elder or teacher should include “achievements” of the past year, while friends will often joke with each other through text messages. When texting a boss, a subordinate must communicate proper respect without overusing flattery. Often, employees are moved when a boss texts on New Year’s Eve to thank them for their contributions throughout the year.

Modern technology enhances interpersonal communication, but at the same time can bring unexpected embarrassments. With the popularity of cell phones, many are overwhelmed by dozens of greetings from friends and even strangers on New Year’s Eve, however it is impolite not to reply. Still, it takes considerable time and energy to reply to each one individually. Some find difficulty composing text messages as poetic and eloquent as popular suggestions found on the internet, but copying those – though time-saving – lacks sincerity and a personal touch.

The best New Year greetings involve emotional exchange – regardless of how they are expressed. Modern devices such as cell phones enable personal contact despite great distance. But they also make it easier to neglect face-to-face communication. Does technology bring people closer together or push them away from each other? Our interpersonal evolution is certainly worth pondering. 

With the popularity of cell phones, text messages have become the major medium to send New Year greetings in China. CFP





The Mysterious Snake

Chinese Zodiac Culture in the Year of the Snake

Text by Zhao Yue

“The Chinese zodiac, or *sheng xiao* (literally “born resembling”), is a rotating cycle of 12 years,” explains Wu Yucheng, Chinese folklore expert and author of *Zodiac and Chinese Culture*. “There is a concrete cultural reason for the selection of each of the 12 specific animals, making the Chinese zodiac a profound cultural phenomenon.”

China’s zodiac presents a unique way of measuring years, with 12 different animals employed as symbols for each. Yet, the years don’t align with the Gregorian (Western) calendar exactly. For example, the Year of the Dragon started on January 23, 2012, and lasts until February 9, 2013. The Year of the Snake begins on February 10, 2013. In China, a person’s age can be easily deduced from his or her zodiac sign. For example, this year, a snake is either 12, 24, 36, or another multiple of 12. Thus, asking one’s sign has become a subtle and tactful method to figure out a person’s age.

The Chinese zodiac begins with the rat, followed by the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig in sequence. Different animals represent different cultural connotations. For example, the rat represents prosperous offspring, the ox connotes ample grain, and the dragon and snake are related to rice farming culture. Since the pig is traditionally deemed to bring home good luck, it is placed at the end of the zodiac cycle to complete an auspicious circle.

The zodiac links birth to rich cultural and artistic manifestations, which in return enhance Chinese culture. Almost every zodiac sign is woven into legends and tales, and plenty of Chinese two-part allegorical

sayings celebrate them, such as, “An old ox chews grass – mutters and mumbles”, “A tiger’s back – never touch it”, and “Tail of a rabbit – it cannot be long.” Legends surrounding zodiac signs are also excellent themes for traditional Chinese operas. Nowadays, people enjoy New Year movies, but in ancient times, people attended Spring Festival operas, which, most of the time, were closely related to the zodiac sign of that specific year. In the Year of the Dragon, *Dragon and Phoenix Bring Auspiciousness* is often performed. A favorite for the Year of the Snake is *Legend of the White Snake*, and the Year of the Monkey often features *The Monkey King*.

People under the snake zodiac sign were born in 1905, 1917, 1929, 1941, 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, and 2013. Similar to Western monthly astrological signs, Chinese people love discussing the influence of each sign on personalities. A person born in the Year of the Snake is considered to be mysterious and passionate, yet come off cool. Greta Garbo, born in 1905 in Sweden, presents one vivid illustration. The legendary Hollywood star left her film career at

her peak in 1941, at age 36. After only 15 years in the film industry, she continued maintaining notorious privacy, and her reclusive lifestyle continued for 50 years, which only further enhanced her mystique.

Snakes are also considered good at planning, purposeful, and able to achieve success step-by-step. Also, they are humorous and deep thinkers. They can be excellent artists, philosophers, theologians, politicians, and financiers. Painter Pablo Picasso, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Paul Krugman, winner of 2008 Nobel Prize in Economics, were all born in the Year of the Snake.

According to traditional Chinese culture, the year corresponding to one’s birth actually brings bad luck. In 2013, snake entrepreneurs should see stable business, and singles may find a new relationship. But they should pay attention to their health. A balanced diet and proper rest are strongly recommended. Snake people should carefully attend to the relationship with their boss this year.

The popularity of the Chinese zodiac has been growing in recent years. Not only have countries such as the United States, Japan, and France issued commemorative stamps featuring the animals to mark Chinese New Year in recent years, but many international luxury brands released snake-themed products to welcome 2013 Spring Festival. At the end of 2012, Vacheron Constantin released limited-edition watches for the Year of the Snake. Dior continued releasing red bracelets with each year’s zodiac sign, which have been popular for years already. The cute design coupled with a comparatively inexpensive price has made the bracelet a sought-after accessory. 



Commemorative stamp for the Year of the Snake issued by China Post



Artists of the Qiang ethnic group sing and dance during Chinese New Year parade in Sydney, 2012.



Variations on Chinese New Year

Text by Scott Huntsman

Photos courtesy of Foreign Affairs Bureau under the Ministry of Culture

It may appear completely foreign to almost everyone in the West, but nearly half of the world can recognize the symbol “人”, although its English counterpart “people” or “person” is likely even more widely recognized now. Similarly, Christmas is observed around the globe as the most major Western holiday, but for the majority of East Asia, the biggest celebration comes a month or so later. Also like language, culture is fluid, evolving and adapting to external influences. Christmas celebration includes globally

constant traits as well as specific regional rituals, and the celebrations surrounding Chinese Lunar New Year are no different.

The origins of the holiday are clear: In an agricultural society (as the country still largely is), the end of winter and dawn of spring is the most hopeful and happy time of the year. Actually, opposite it, Christmas’s position in early winter was placed as such to align with winter solstice on the Roman calendar, a celebration called “Saturnalia”. Early Christians adapted to the conform with the practices of their

environment. Globalization and constantly improving travel technology has made the world a smaller place, and cultural coalescence abounds like never before. Christmas trees already sparkle across China’s metropolises in December, but for many in the West, Chinese New Year is still a meager blip on the calendar.

Like many Americans, my first impression of Chinese New Year came via images of dragon dancing in a parade on television, broadcast from San Francisco. Flipping through television channels or



A game of picking up beans with chopsticks at an international school in Oxford during the Spring Festival of 2012.



Children attended Chinese New Year celebrations in Trafalgar Square, London, 2012.

glancing at a picture in the newspaper around that time of year was one of the few ways the holiday ever came to anyone's attention. Later, in Los Angeles, I became close-enough friends with American-born Chinese people to discover that they expected to receive money from their parents around early February, money that would come stuffed in a small red envelope with unintelligible pictographs scribbled on them.

Eventually, though, the holiday would impact me directly, professionally. As an office manager of a company involved in importing Chinese-made toys and selling them on the internet in America, I soon learned that it was next-to-impossible to order shipments of goods from China in late January and all of February, or even get anyone on the phone, for that matter. We marveled that the massive country seemed to shut down completely for an entire month while even the humblest of factory workers traveled home to spend time with their families. For most factories, the shutdown is actually only fifteen days, but many employees never show up again. Throughout the country, turnover is at its highest during this period. After taking a

trip home, many choose the "new", as is custom, and opt not to return to their job, and the effects are felt in the West.

In fact, the holiday's economic impact shows in financial numbers from the U.S. Department of Commerce. The United States' trade deficit with China has always been lowest in the first quarter since 2007, with roughly one third fewer goods and service being imported from China than compared to the third quarter. The third quarter, when the trade gap is largest, is when wholesalers start stocking up to supply the Western holiday season.

Economic Impact

As the new-found economic power of the the Chinese public has increased global corporate interest in the country, it won't be long before some business finds a way to capitalize on Chinese holidays, but currently few Westerners engage in any of the customary activities. In fact, as many Americans lament that traditional holidays are now little more than commercial vehicles to push spending, this specific trend is what pushes Western holidays in China while the reverse hardly happens. Although Chinese people thoroughly clean their

houses and buy new clothes for the New Year, gifts to kids are usually cash, which often goes straight in the bank. Families gather to eat, watch TV, and light firecrackers. Nothing in this scenario is likely to inspire Westerners to open their wallets.

Although the influence of Chinese New Year may not be ubiquitous in mainstream Western culture yet, it's impact on the international scene is still large. As culture so often does, especially Chinese culture, it adapts to its environment. Overseas Chinese communities followed their neighbors' tradition of New Year Day parades and started organizing their own for Chinese New Year. Chinese parades can now be found in almost every major Western city, usually sponsored by the cities' respective Chinese Chambers of Commerce. In 2009, CNN suggested that six of the "best" Chinese New Year parties could be found in Honolulu, Singapore, Hong Kong, London, and Sydney. However, the greater New York Metro area claims its five Chinatowns in Manhattan, Flushing, Queens, Brooklyn, and Sunset Park, respectively, throw some of the biggest parties in the world. In mainland China, people skip the parties and parades to spend the time with



Chinese and Japanese college students receive souvenirs during a 2012 Spring Festival cultural event.

family in front of the TV, and conversely Chinese people party on Christmas Day.

Perhaps trumping every foreign celebration, however, San Francisco's Chinese New Year Parade is the quintessential symbol of overseas Chinese culture. San Francisco is known for the largest Chinese population in the West, and along with the lineage of many of its residents, its Chinese New Year parade can be traced back to the mid-19th Century and the railroad days. Today, its paper dragon dance requires 100 dancers, and in 2011, a million viewers watched the parade either in person or on television.

However, the most unexpected Chinese New Year parade is in Butte, a mountainous Montana town with a population of only 34,000. And Butte's remaining Chinese population is negligible. Although it had one of the most booming Chinatowns of the 19th Century, most of its residents fled to California due to increasing racial hostility, and only a museum remains, which sponsors the parade. Organizers claim that it is the shortest and coldest Chinese New Year parade in the world. Its paper dragon spends 364 days a year in the museum before a quick 15-minute run

down an icy street.

Nationwide, the United States Postal Service has been issuing a new commemorative Chinese New Year postage stamp in each of the past six years, and plans to continue for at least six more to cover each animal on the Chinese zodiac.

Travel Time

For Westerners living in China, the late winter vacation is a chance to travel, although doing so within China can be more trouble than it's worth, since it's the largest annual migration of people humankind has ever witnessed. Educators enjoy the longest holiday, as is often true in the West. During the vacation, school campuses will become veritable ghost towns complete with rolling tumbleweeds, so foreign teachers almost always get away and travel. Those in the cold North lust for milder temperatures due south, but a trip within China will bring expensive and packed trains and planes, as over a billion people attempt to travel home at the same time, and upon arrival in your destination, most businesses may be closed anyway.

However, a plane ticket from Beijing to any number of nearby foreign Asian

locations can be extremely affordable and lack the pressure of domestic travel. Westerners who teach in Beijing and Shanghai frequently use the break to travel to places such as the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and India. I traveled to the Philippines one year, and it was then that I witnessed the most widespread observance of Chinese New Year outside of China. It's not cultural – as a mostly Catholic nation with heavy Spanish and American influence, the appearance of Chinese New Year in the Philippines seems purely commercial – caused by a new heavy influx of Chinese tourists. Just a quick 2-hour flight from Taiwan and slightly longer from the mainland, the Chinese presence in the Philippines during the holiday was major. They're not alone: all of Southeast Asia sees a bump in tourism during the season, and the rest of them are also innovating ways to lure Chinese holiday spending.

There's no reason not to like new excuses to celebrate and join in the happiness and hope of our global neighbors. In China, the holiday is called simply "Spring Festival", and that's exactly what it is – and can be – throughout the world.

In the season finale of his television show *Louie*, American comedian Louis C.K. is so devastated by his ex-wife taking his daughters away on vacation on New Year's Eve that he ends up randomly jumping on a flight from New York to Beijing to see the Yellow River. The season fades out after Louie wanders into the abode of a random rural Chinese family, whose members enthusiastically invite him to join their feast. The protagonist, an American everyman, ultimately discovers similar love and community he was missing from his own broken home, and gets it from complete strangers on the other side of the world. 



On Spring Festival, tens of thousands of Shenzhen citizens and migrant workers enjoy performances at the southern square of Shenzhen Grand Theatre. *by Liang Jiahe*



Red Envelopes for the World

Text by Wen Xi

For Chinese children, the best part of Lunar New Year's Eve is receiving red envelopes of lucky money from elders, rich and poor. During the festival – the biggest holiday of the year – adults enjoy family reunions, visit friends and relatives, shop for new clothes, stroll through temple fairs, and eat big meals.

Similar to Christmas, such a festive occasion creates tremendous opportunities for businesses in almost every sector, particularly culture, transportation, tourism, telecommunications, and dining, and the comprehensive seasonal stimulus characterizes the Spring Festival economy.

In 2012, for example, passenger volume during Spring Festival reached 3.137 billion trips, and in 2013 it is expected to top 3.4 billion – more than twice total population of China. When it comes to tourism, during the seven-day holiday last year, Beijing welcomed 8.27 million visitors who injected a total of 3.4 billion yuan into its local economy.

The bump in total retail sales in December and January is huge, before plummeting in February.

Over the last few years, as China has seen rapid economic development, impact of the thriving Spring Festival economy has rippled across the planet.

During 2012 Spring Festival, for instance, Vancouver, Canada, hosted a Chinese temple fair with brightly-colored signs and lanterns accented by boisterous beating of drums and gongs. Virtually every local Chinese community and group participated in the celebration, injecting unprecedented Eastern flavor into the Western coastal city. The festival also heated up Vancouver's winter economy, and words such as "hot" and "noisy" were frequently seen in local media reports.

Thailand's biggest traditional holiday can trace its roots back to China and falls at the same time of the year. The increasing flow of tourists from China inspired the Thai tourism industry to merge native celebrations with Chinese New Year in an attempt to attract even more Chinese holiday visitors.

Chinese immigrants have brought


Spring Festival elements to every corner of the world. Icons of festive Chinese culture, such as knots, floats, child-faced over-sized masks, stilt walking, and dragon dances, bring delight across cultural boundaries. Travel agencies and major international shopping destinations were overjoyed last year to see greater numbers of Chinese tourists contributing to local economies as part of their celebration at the dawn of Year of the Dragon.

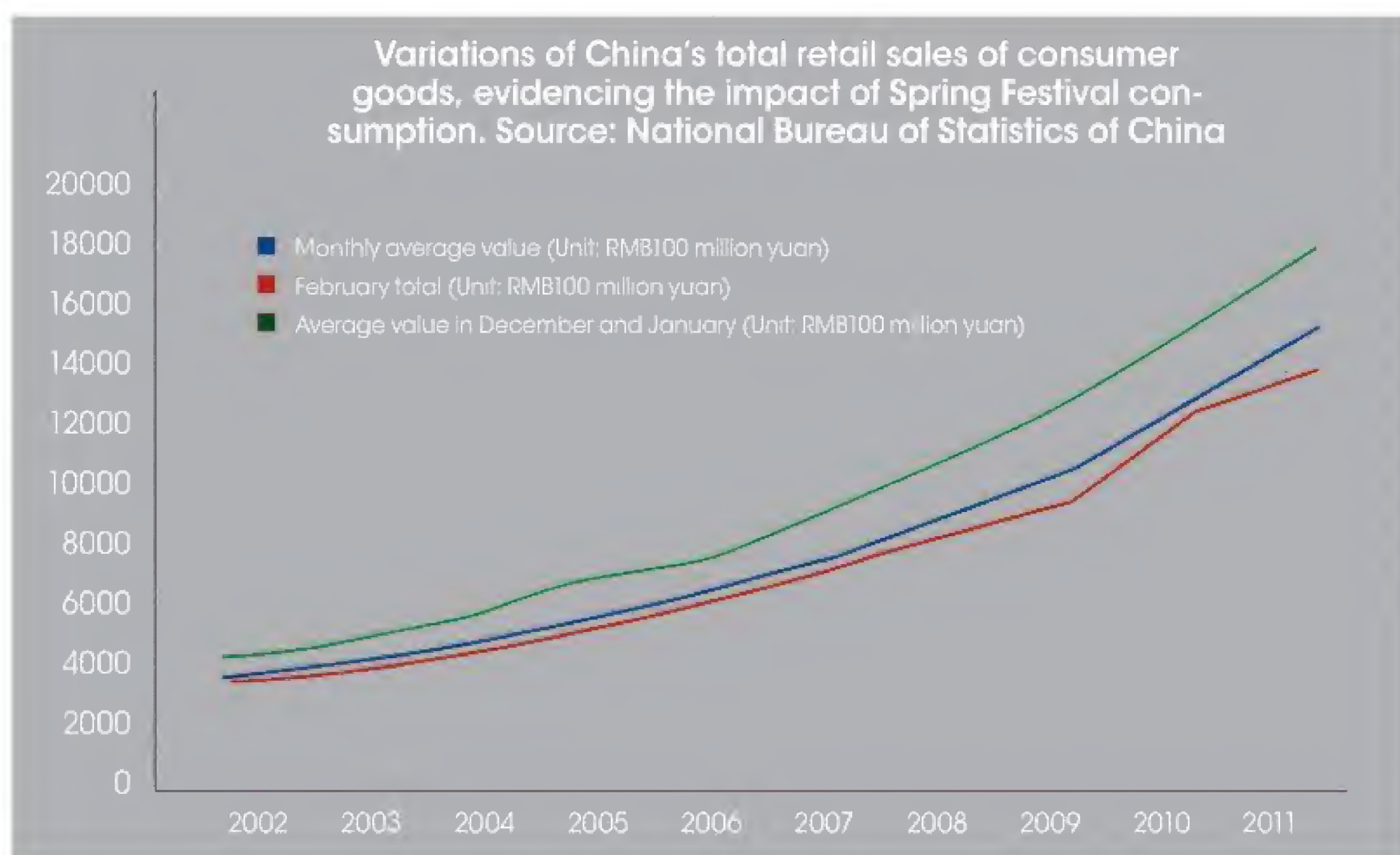
According to media reports and authoritative analysis, during last Spring Festival, Chinese visitors contributed to a 10-percent jump in retail sales in Japan and injected 4 billion THB (approximately US\$133 million) into Thailand. Lotte Department Store in Seoul, South Korea, saw its Chinese customer flow triple over the previous year. Chinese visitors to Shilla Duty Free Shop jumped 273 percent. And the flow of Chinese consumers to Europe during Spring Festival increased 15 percent, despite rising travel costs.

During the two months around Spring Festival, both imports and exports from bonded warehouses skyrocket due to heavy

tourist flow, bringing a drastic increase in sales of commodities in duty-free zones. Trade between China and popular holiday destinations, such as South Korea, Thailand, and Maldives, is extremely busy during this season.

China is the world's largest exporter: It accounted for 10.4 percent of global exports in 2011. It is also the world's second largest importer, accounting for 9.5 percent of the global total the same year. When Chinese people around the world, including businesspeople, indulge in the big holiday instead of endeavoring to make money, global trade is inevitably affected. China's monthly gross exports from July to December 2011 remained at US\$170 billion, and gross imports at US\$150 billion. The figures slumped to US\$149.8 billion and 122.7 billion respectively in January 2012, and then fluctuated to US\$114.4 billion and 146.1 billion respectively in February. The numbers gradually rose back to normal after the festival.

As China has become more export-oriented, China's "lucky money" has become more involved in the global economy. 



Tracking Urbanization

Journalist Wang Jun and His Contemplation of Beijing

Text by Zhang Hong



Wang Jun is a journalist who has worked with Xinhua News Agency for more than two decades.

Wang began working at the Beijing-based news agency upon graduating from college in 1991 when China was experiencing its fastest and most massive urbanization in history.

In Wang's computer is one of his treasures – an old picture of Beijing City taken from atop the White Pagoda in Beihai Park in 1912.

“What a beautiful city!” every time he looks at the image his pulse races. “More than a million people were making a living there, yet it was fundamentally a forest. Every courtyard had trees, and from that high point the city looked like a sea of green. The blue-bricked and grey-tiled courtyard houses were hidden beneath the green canopy.” Wang was reminded of what I. M. Pei said when the Chinese-American architect first climbed Jingshan Hill in Beijing: “I am Chinese.”

Bulldozers' Force

On July 13, 2001, Beijing won the bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games. After witnessing the jubilant celebration on Chang'an Avenue late that night, Wang was filled with peaceful wishes as well as worry for the city. On his way back

home from work, he noticed that Tu'er and Xiang'er *hutongs* (traditional alleyways), from the 13th and mid-14th centuries respectively, had disappeared without a trace. That same year, permanent residents of the city passed 20 million, and the former residence of well-known 20th-Century architectural historian, architect, city planner, and educator Liang Sicheng (1901-1972), and his wife, architect and poet Lin Huiyin (1904-1955), was razed. Statistics of China's third national cultural heritage census showed that 969 unmovable cultural relics had vanished.

After Beijing's successful bid for the 2008 Olympics, 280 billion yuan was earmarked for preparations. “We were so moved after hearing the news,” Wang recalls, “because it meant that the door of the country would remain irreversibly open. It was an honorable event, but at the same time we worried what the city would become after the large investment was spent.” All his worries and thoughts on the problem later inspired his bestselling *Beijing Record, a Physical and Political History of Planning Modern Beijing*.

Since the 1950s, the capital city started expanding outward from a single center point so vividly that it has been compared to “making a pancake from the center out.” “The trend of radiation from a single center structure will emphasize focus on the development of infrastructure in the central area, which will create considerable construction work in the central area,” Wang explains. “The present central area of Beijing evolved from what it was in the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and

Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. In 1949, it was already home to 1.3 million residents and was already covered with buildings. So, adding so many more buildings in an already crowded central area inevitably leads to pulling down old ones, large-scale relocation of residents, and ultimately daily commuting problems.”

“Beijing's traffic problem can be largely attributed to excessive concentration of city employment functions around the Forbidden City,” Wang continues. “Now, the suburban area is for sleeping. For example, Wangjing, Tiantongyuan and several other peripheral residential quarters accommodate several hundred thousand people. So, every day hundreds of thousands of people travel to the city for work in the morning and return home to the suburbs in the evening.”

Wang contends that even if it had been a spacious area without established urban districts and the Forbidden City, the one-centered structure plan was terrible for a city that would accommodate a population of 10 million, never mind one with so much priceless heritage in its central area.

A Tsinghua University professor even once revealed to Wang that some people had proposed removing the Forbidden City.

Astonished and shocked, Wang tracked down and interviewed the architect responsible for the removal project and read the files he could find. Everything he heard and saw confirmed the professor's revelation. “Beijing made two plans to remove the old city in the past,” Wang notes. “One was in 1990, and it aimed to renovate the dilapi-

The *siheyuan* (quadrangle with rooms arranged on four sides of a courtyard) is a traditional Chinese dwelling style. In old Beijing, the blue-bricked and gray-tiled *siheyuans* were clustered together creating a unique scene. Pictured are *siheyuans* near Nanluoguo Lane that were added to the protection list of the city in 1987. *Xinhua*





Alley residents are often familiar rivals in Chinese chess. *Xinhua*



4 Beidaji Lane in Dajipian traditional hutong area, Xicheng District, Beijing. Left: A child plays in front of a quadrangle on February 22, 2007. Right: The same site on April 3, 2012. *CFP*



dated old houses in ten years. The other was made in 2000 with the goal to renovate dilapidated houses in five years. Today, probably less than a third of the old urban district remains.”

Construction of a Multicenter City with Balanced Development

In the first quarter of 2011, subway passengers surpassed 400 million in Beijing, a phenomenon jokingly described by netizens as “people in but flat pictures out; biscuits in but flour out.”

“This is the consequence of past planning,” Wang sighs, visibly pained every time he mentions the removal of old districts. “We feel the pain Mr. Liang Sicheng experienced.”

Wang is a firm supporter of Liang, who dedicated himself to preserving the country’s ancient buildings and cultural relics his entire life. In spite of his efforts to preserve the old capital, the former city gates and city walls were torn down in the 1950s. Wang highly praises Liang’s ideas on urban planning: A large municipality should be divided into several small districts that resemble cells, separated by green belts. When one cell is full, a new one should be built.

“I became very excited when I first read Liang’s plan,” Wang grins. “He answered the exact question I had been pondering: How to free the city from traffic congestion. This is a plan for the future.”

“His plan not only focused on the protection of the old town,” Wang adds. “It also pointed out that placing the administrative area near the Forbidden City would cause a great number of people to move outside the city, and eventually these people would have to travel all the way to the old town for work. This is the main

culprit for the traffic problem.”

But ironically, even Liang’s former residence was a victim of the “removal storm.”

In the 1930s, Liang documented the important city walls and city gates in Beijing with his camera and even conducted surveying and mapping work. “It is really painful,” Wang sighs as he examines those maps now at Tsinghua University. “Just as his work was completed, Japan launched war against China. Liang and his wife were forced to leave Beijing, and never got the chance to publish his survey of Beijing’s city walls.”


Wang and his colleague Liu Jiang conducted a joint survey on the municipal development model of Beijing, trying to determine whether Beijing’s layout could possibly meet the requirements for expansion for the 2008 Olympics.

The survey attracted major attention from decision-makers and triggered a massive project to edit and revise Beijing’s overall plan. In January 2005, Beijing City Master Plan (2004-2005) was approved by the State Council. The plan included comprehensive preservation of the old city, reinforced development of new urban districts, and adjustments of urban structures as its strategic goals.

Wang is excited that the latest master plan for Beijing has finally returned to the blueprint of Liang and Chen Zhanxiang (1916-2001), another city planning expert who also pushed an idea in the 1950s that has not yet been realized: to construct a city with several centers and balanced development.

Wang attributes Beijing’s traffic congestion problem to the improper layout of the city and related strategy. “We live in a highly dense society excessively dependent on car transportation,” Wang opines. “About 30 percent of the residents travel by car, another 30 percent by the means of public transit and the rest by bicycle or on foot. Beijing has been developing various transportation modes equally, and the result is that all modes have encountered trouble.”

However, Wang rejoices that over the past decade the public has been more involved in protecting Beijing’s cultural relics, and that related government sectors have begun realizing that listening and cooperation are crucial to better preservation.

“The city has already mapped out a master plan for comprehensive preservation of the old city,” Wang stresses. “It requires the unremitting efforts of every citizen who loves his or her hometown.” 

About Wang Jun

Wang Jun, senior reporter with Xinhua News Agency, currently works with *Outlook*, a weekly publication affiliated with Xinhua. He is the author of *Beijing Record, a Physical and Political History of Planning Modern Beijing*, *City Documentation*, and *A Decade into the Urban Century*. The *New York Review* compared *Beijing Record* to Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, a classic that inspired urban planners to change the way they contemplate the city environment, and called Wang’s book a classic documenting the nation’s great efforts in urban conservation.

The Other Bush

Text by Zhang Lei and Wang Xixian

His face may not be recognizable to most, but his family name is as well known as any in American politics.

He has engaged in extensive promotion of volunteerism and Sino-American relations

in China while conducting business in real estate, energy, mining, and investment consulting. The son of former President George H.W. Bush and a younger brother of former President George W. Bush, his name is Neil Bush.

Why is He Special?

We met Neil Bush in his Houston office. He wore a slightly wrinkled blue shirt and black-framed glasses. A landscape painting hung on the wall, and a toy sailboat rested on a cabinet, a common souvenir from China's small commodity markets.

The opposite wall seemed to be his photo exhibition area. In the center hung a picture of his extended family, taken during the 12th and last time they spent Christmas at Camp David. The office is connected to a room where Bush displays his collection of Chinese memorabilia, including golden dragons on red plates, vases, and souvenir medals in boxes. His favorite piece in the collection is a portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong.

His album included photos he took during the 1970s and 1980s when he and his parents visited Beijing, including shots of pedestrians on street, the Great Wall, and other sights along the bike tour. "Look at those two men," he smiled, pointing at one of the images. "They stared at me and my brothers and sisters non-stop. People at that time were just too curious about us."

Bush first visited China in 1975, and those unforgettable memories seemed to be his favorite. Streets were filled with only bicycles and pedestrians. He recalled that only the most basic daily necessities were displayed in shop windows. Everyone wore similar outfits in limited colors. That year, when he and his siblings visited the zoo to see giant pandas, they drew massive attention. Locals showed far more interest in them than the animals.

In his simple Houston office, Bush proudly displayed evidence of his deep



This photo, posted on August 27, 2012, on Neil Bush's Weibo, sparked an instant sensation on the internet. *Courtesy of Neil Bush*

connection with China. Since 1975, he has visited nearly 100 times.

“The Other Side of the River is China”

On August 27, 2012, Bush posted a photo on his verified Weibo (the Chinese version of Twitter) account. The image showed him wearing a green cap with a red star and a “Serve the People” satchel, grinning as he held a mug featuring Mao Zedong. Beneath this outfit he still wore a suit. The caption for the photo, in both Chinese and English, read, “I’m thinking of joining the Chinese Communist Party. What do you think of my accessories?”

This post sparked an instant sensation on the internet. Bush’s Chinese assistant translated many online comments from Chinese netizens for him. He considered most comments humorous and witty. However, the post angered some American netizens: “The Bush family wants to sell us to China,” commented some.

Bush shrugs off such criticism. “I don’t think that’s a serious topic,” he asserted, adding that some people lack a sense of humor and don’t get jokes. He took the picture for fun. “I thought the smile on my face would explain everything,” he sighed, raising his hands in exasperation.

As an American who started observing China before the country introduced reform and opening up, Bush has a deep, personal understanding of China’s changes and the Chinese public’s mentality. He explains his feelings on the Sino-American relationship by comparing the U.S. to a beautiful big house on one side of the river, with China on the other side. He explains that today, many Chinese people including government officials, young people, and workers, desire a beautiful big house. From what he has seen on Weibo, some people

want it right away. But life is never so easy. He explains that China needs to continue working carefully on its home in order to make it big and beautiful, which requires time. He recalled 1975, when the only houses he saw in China were shabby, and compared that era to the tremendous improvements today. Bush hopes that Chinese people will continue working to perfect its legal system, fight corruption, and maintain development focused on economic construction. Eventually, China will “have its big beautiful house.”

A Non-political Member of a Political Family

Compared to his journeys to China, Neil Bush’s professional career in the United States was not quite as smooth.


He served on the board of directors of Denver-based Silverado Savings and Loan during the 1980s’ savings and loan crisis. Doug Wead, a former special assistant to President George H. W. Bush, opined that if not for that scandal, Neil Bush may have also entered the political arena like his father and brothers. He once asked for advice from his brothers on campaigning when they got together.

Eventually, however, he emerged as a

“non-political member of a political family” and devoted his energy to business and nurturing his father’s connection to China. He believes that everyone in the world can find a way to help others. It is his elite family background that propels him to find new ways to serve.

To promote volunteerism, his father founded the Points of Light Institute years ago. Now, Neil Bush is chairman of the organization. He also often participates in events that discuss Sino-American relations in China on behalf of his father.

As his father has aged, the former President’s pace of life has slowed. However, the old man still has ambition. Neil Bush revealed that his father still keeps busy and wants to set a good example for other elders. The former President went skydiving on his 85th birthday and took a speed boat ride in Maine.

Peter Schweizer, co-author of *The Bushes: Portrait of a Dynasty*, describes the family as the “most successful political dynasty in American history.” While some are already discussing Neil’s nephew George P. Bush’s prospects for political office, Neil Bush reminds people that his own son, Pierce Bush, has also become inspired to serve the American people. 

Links

On August 30, 2011, a Weibo post attracted considerable attention. The original post in Chinese read, “I am a non-political member from a political family.” The sender was named Neil Bush, and the account was verified by Weibo.com. “Believe it or not, my father used to be the American President, and my brother also used to be President. I hope to help you understand my family through Weibo and boost understanding between our two countries.”

Since then, Neil Bush and his Chinese assistant have been posting on Weibo almost daily. At present, he has amassed nearly 140,000 followers. Compared with Weibo, his Twitter account is much less active.

Visit Neil Bush’s Weibo: <http://weibo.com/neilbush>



Xu Bing: Seizing the Day

Text by Liang Sufang

Uncredited photographs courtesy of Xu Bing

Xu's work Ghost Pounding the Wall.



by Dong Fang

Although Wenling of Zhejiang Province is his ancestral home, Xu was born in Chongqing in 1955, and grew up in Beijing. In 1977, he was admitted to the Printmaking Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. After graduation in 1981, he stayed at the academy as a teacher. In 1987, he received a master's degree from CAFA and moved to the United States in 1990. Xu returned to China in 2007 and served as vice president, professor, and Ph. D. supervisor at CAFA. His work has been exhibited at the New York-based Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Louvre, the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Venice Biennale.

Sacrificing his independence as an internationally renowned artist, Xu Bing returned to China in 2007, and a year later accepted an appointment as vice president of China's Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), which thrust him into the spotlight of China's art and education circles.

After graduating from CAFA's Printmaking Department in 1981, Xu remained at the school as a teacher. In 1990, he left CAFA for the United States. From that point forward, he lived abroad for 18 years. His work, including *Book from the Sky*, *Ghost Pounding the Wall*, and *Square Word Calligraphy*, won considerable acclaim, positioning him amongst the top contemporary Chinese artists in the international arena. Now, Xu has served as CAFA Vice President for nearly five years.

Along with his lofty reputation in

the Western art world, the avant-garde Chinese artist is also widely accepted in the Chinese educational system. When asked about his method of surviving in the system, Xu's recalled his own education at CAFA some 30 years ago. Xu believed that CAFA embodied the basic concepts of China's art education. Its tradition focuses on reality and service to the people. After performing excellently at CAFA, Xu visited many countries and sought their respective artistic atmospheres. The artistic values he learned in his early days continue to bring him the greatest inspiration today. "Some have marveled at my ability to continually produce new creations," he reveals. "The reason is that I know, as an artist, how to connect with the real world."


Xu doesn't like to pit tradition against modernity. Some ask artists whether they specialize in traditional or modern style, as



Xu's work *Book from the Ground* was exhibited in Shanghai in April 2012.

if they are mutually exclusive. Xu believes that tradition and modernity are perpetually infused and inseparable. It is impossible to objectively rank artistic styles. There is no such thing as superior or inferior artistic style. But excellent artists are well aware of the relationship between their work and the era, especially the likes of Qi Baishi, Andy Warhol, and Marcel Duchamp. “I have a tight grip on the times. Some complain about reality, but that’s what we need to face. Artists must absorb their nutrition from real life. I know the connection between life and art, and that’s from whence my inspiration.”

These days, Xu’s art production has slowed due to his busy schedule. Some of his colleagues in the West lament that they “have lost a great artist.” “They care about my work and hope to spark more creative energy,” Xu smiles. “Actually, an artist needs to produce certain work during a certain period. If you cannot produce work during a specific phase, you can never again even after this period is over.”

Although the drop in creation bothers Xu somewhat, he believes his role as vice president of CAFA helps him understand and become immersed in China’s present reality, and see deeper into the country’s rapid development and change. 



Xu's work *1st Class* is a rug-like sculpture resembling tiger skin, but composed of cigarettes.

The project *Where does the Dust Itself Collect?* utilizes dust that Xu Bing collected in the streets of Lower Manhattan in the aftermath of 9/11. Recreating a field of dust across a floor surface, punctuated by the outline of a poem, the work explores the relationship between material and spiritual worlds.





Hand-made tools and printing blocks Xu used to create *Book from the Sky*.

It took Xu four years to create *Book from the Sky*, a project composed of 4,000 meaningless made-up Chinese characters. The project created a sensation in the international art community in the 1980s and 90s.

Working on *Book from the Sky*.





“FOR THE FACE OF MR. CHIANG”

Text by Ding Ge

Photographs courtesy of Lu Xiaoping

In 1943, soon after he became president of National Central University (today's Nanjing University), Chiang Kai-shek, then leader of the Kuomintang, invited three prestigious professors from the university's Department of Chinese Language and Literature to a Spring Festival banquet. The invitation embarrassed the professors, who spent an afternoon discussing whether they should accept to save Chiang "face." Decades lat-

er, during the “cultural revolution” (1966-1976), the same professors were required to confess whether they accepted Chiang’s invitation. The truth was tough to find after so many years. This is the plot of *For the Face of Mr. Chiang*, a play produced by teachers and students of Nanjing University. The War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the “cultural revolution” were two of the roughest periods for contemporary Chinese intellectuals. How did the three professors with varying political ideologies treat the invitation from a dictator such as Chiang Kai-shek, and how did

they stick to their political ideals and moral principles in the chaotic period of “cultural revolution”?

The drama sparked heated debate among Chinese micro-bloggers about moral integrity and weaknesses of intellectuals. The play’s director, Lu Xiaoping, is vice dean of the School of Humanities and head of the Department of Theater, Movie and Television of Nanjing University. The playwright, Wen Fangyi, is a junior in the university’s School of Humanities. The drama premiered in May of last year, and by mid-December 2012, it had been per-

formed 31 times at the university and seen by more than 20,000. The drama has since moved beyond the campus.

From every perspective, the production is considered miraculous. A college junior born in the 1990s, its playwright deftly depicts the complicated struggles of professors seven decades ago. Director Lu, who has denounced the country’s drama production system, has now received high recognition from the same authorities he criticized. At the end of last year, the Publicity Department of the Provincial Party Committee of Jiangsu booked three days of

The play *For the Face of Mr. Chiang* is set in two separate historical periods. The first scene is set in 1943, when the three professors displayed distinctive personalities ripe with profound wisdom of the era.





In the play, the three professors become nervous and bow to authority during the “cultural revolution.”

performances of the drama, and the head of the department even watched it personally.

Intellectuals of the 1940s

From 1943 to 1944, Chiang Kai-shek served as president of today’s Nanjing University. The drama is based on an unconfirmed story that has bounced around the university: Chiang probably invited three professors from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature for dinner before

he took office as the university’s president in 1943.

Wen Fangyi received an “assignment” from Director Lu to write a story depicting how the three professors might debate accepting Chiang’s invitation based on the one-sentence rumor. In order to examine the environment and spiritual world of Chinese intellectuals in that era, she then dug through many historical records and documents, such as *The History of the*

United University in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, *Professors of the United University*, and diaries of famous contemporary Chinese scholars such as Wu Mi and Zhu Ziqing. Her efforts were ultimately rewarded, and she obtained deep insight into the historical background.

“It was a depressing time,” Wen sighs. “In the early days of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, Chinese intellectuals displayed tremendous enthu-



siasm in the campaign against the invaders. After the United States entered World War II in 1941, the international situation changed and the Kuomintang government shifted its focus to suppressing domestic dissent, resulting in a repressive social atmosphere. Meanwhile, the Chinese public was plagued by surging prices due to precipitous inflation. In these circumstances, many intellectuals and students became depressed and confused.”

The play is set in two separate historical periods: World War II and the “cultural revolution.” In 1943, the three professors showed distinctive personalities ripe with profound wisdom of the era. However, they became nervous and bowed to authority during the “cultural revolution,” and became eager to prove their loyalty by insisting “Chiang should die.”

Some critics have compared the drama to British playwright Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen* (1998). That play has only three characters, but garnered immense acclaim in Western theatrical circles. Similarly, the three professors in *For the Face of Mr. Chiang*, Shi Rendao, Bian Congzhou, and Xia Xiaoshan, also rush explanations about Chiang’s invitation during the 1943 Spring Festival to defend themselves.

In the eyes of Director Lu, the value of the drama lies in the absurdity of mankind recounted in the story. “All good plays try to showcase the baseline of morality and examine puzzles of humanity,” he illustrates. “The reason *For the Face of Mr. Chiang* is so popular isn’t the tragedy of the war and ‘cultural revolution,’ but the eternal tragic and comedic characteristics of humanity, and humility we all feel.”

A Young Girl’s Chinese Story

It’s hard to believe that such a meaningful drama was penned by a young girl born in the 1990s. As one professional critic raved, “No other play in recent years has depicted a Chinese story with such profound cultural and philosophical insight as this drama.”

The playwright, Wen Fangyi, is a native of Nanjing. In addition to her continuing studies in the Department of Theater, Movie and Television, she also plays the wife of Shi Rendao in the play. The character is an ordinary Chinese woman who




Playwright Wen Fangyi.

cares about living with dignity and protecting her husband.

The university’s tradition of freedom has deeply influenced young people like Wen. When the box office opened, even the university’s leaders weren’t given free admission. “This explains why Nanjing University could produce such a drama,” Director Lu declares.

On November 25, 2012, Professor Dong Jian from Nanjing University and his wife watched *For the Face of Mr. Chiang* for the second time. Professor Dong, 76, first enrolled in Nanjing University in 1957. Since then, he has continuously studied and worked there. Playwright Wen once consulted Professor Dong with some questions while writing the play. “I suggested she compare old-time scholars with today’s intellectuals who suffer from spiritual confusion.” Professor Dong seems to care more about the spiritual state of current Chinese universities and intellectuals.

However, as a student of Nanjing University known for its tradition of freedom, Wen wanted to address the eternal spiritual predicament of intellectuals: They desire freedom and independence, but also need to put food on the table; they have a strong sense of responsibility to society, yet distance themselves from politics and authority. “Such contradictions have little to do with the era,” Wen adds, “because the concepts are eternal.” 

Fresh Face of a Seasoned Seminary

Text by Chen Biao

Labrang Monastery in western Xiahe County of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, known as the world seminary of Tibetan Buddhism, is currently undergoing its biggest renovation in 300 years. “On September 17, 2012, the protection and renovation project for Labrang Monastery was launched,” reveals Sonam Je, deputy head of Xiahe County Administrative Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio, Film, and Television. “In addition to the annual investment, the central government earmarked 305 million yuan in the renovation, and the whole project is expected to last seven or eight years.”

A Closer Look of Labrang Monastery

Why was such a huge sum of money invested in renovating a monastery? A closer look at the structure may provide some insight.

In the Tibetan language, “Labrang” means “residence of Living Buddhas.” The monastery stands on a rolling mountain that resembles the shape of a phoenix, inspiring its name, “Phoenix Mountain.” Facing Phoenix Mountain is Dragon Mountain which was also named after its shape. The Daxia River flows between the two mountains and forms a semicircular basin. Tibetan people call the place Tashi

Basin, a name with auspicious undertones. In 1709, Jamyang, the first Living Buddha of Labrang, founded the monastery with his followers.

Over the past 300 years, the monastery has consistently expanded. Now, it is comprised of six institutes, 48 halls and rooms for the Living Buddhas and 12,000 rooms for lamas. Classified by functionality, the complex is divided into five sections, including sutra halls, Buddha halls, residences of Living Buddhas, bedrooms for lamas, and rooms for other functions.

Labrang Monastery is one of the six ancestral monasteries of the Gelugpa (Yellow) Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Labrang





1,700 prayer wheels can be found at Labrang Monastery. *by Dong Fang*

has preserved six traditional institutes, namely the Institute of Exoteric Buddhism, the Higher Institute of Theology, the Lower Institute of Theology, the Institute of Kalachakra, the Institute of Hevajra, and the

Institute of Medicine.

Of the six, the Institute of Exoteric Buddhism is the largest, and focuses only on its namesake. The other five are smaller and teach esoteric Buddhism. The major

Labrang Monastery lies between the Phoenix and Dragon Mountains, an auspicious area to Tibetan people. *by Wan Quan*

difference between exoteric and esoteric Buddhism is that the exoteric sect emphasizes philosophy that can be imparted to anyone. Students are free to debate tenets of the religion and can even pursue the equivalent of a doctorate degree. Requirements for practicing esoteric Buddhism are much more rigid. Without tutors' guidance and *abhisheka* (a method for performing esoteric transmission), esoteric Buddhism cannot be passed on to others or practiced in public. The highest degree a student can earn in esoteric Buddhism is a bachelor's degree. A lama can start his studies at the Institute of Exoteric Buddhism before transferring to one of the other five institutes. However, if a lama first studies esoteric Buddhism, he is not allowed to transfer to the Exoteric Institute.

The Institute of Exoteric Buddhism places emphasis on listening to sutras and meditating, both methods of practicing Buddhism. The Institute of Exoteric Buddhism was the first to be constructed after Jamyang founded the monastery, and also the largest in terms of scale and enroll-





Every year, Labrang Monastery hosts the Buddha-Shining Festival. /C

ment. Many lamas come to the institute to study, and at peak times, the number reaches about 3,000.

Of the five institutes of esoteric Buddhism, rules in the Higher Institute of Theology and the Lower Institute of Theology

are highly strict and complicated. Lamas must agree to follow specific procedures and take oaths before they are admitted. They also must follow a number of rules during their studies. For instance, lamas are forbidden to wear silk, eat too much, or

even make noises while eating. They are also required to hold alms bowls in hand when eating, hold a stick when going out, and keep their heads down when walking.

“Kalachakra” means reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism, and also alludes to the existence of reality passing in a flash like the wheel of time. The Institute of Kalachakra teaches astrology, language, poetry, calligraphy, and music. Perhaps the most important task of the institute is constructing Tibetan calendars for upcoming years.

Hevajra, also called Happy Vajra, is a yidam of Anuttara Yoga in Tibetan Buddhism. The Institute of Hevajra is a comprehensive art school that teaches Tibetan grammar, calligraphy, music, dance, and mandala sand painting.

In the Institute of Medicine, students learn how to treat patients as well as how to collect and process Tibetan medicine and study Buddhist sutras along with medical books. Every summer and autumn, lamas trek into the fields to collect medicinal herbs.

The defining feature of Tibetan Buddhism at Labrang Monastery is its systematic teaching methods perfected over centuries of development. All six institutes retain religious discipline as their foundations. Today, the monastery houses a collection of 30,000 Buddhist statues, 70,000 sutra holders, and a wealth of murals, embroideries, and scroll paintings. The monastery is also home to about 65,000 volumes of sutras and books, covering fields such as philosophy, esoteric Buddhism, medicine, poetry, history, biography, rhetoric, and astronomy.

Careful Renovation

The current renovation project for Labrang Monastery includes protection

and repair of cultural relics, infrastructure enhancement, and construction of supporting facilities. Despite recent repairs of the monastery, the mud and wood structure remains in urgent need of attention due to cracks and leaks brought by the passage of time. Murals have also been damaged.

Since this is the biggest maintenance and repair project in the monastery's 300-year history, its staff, the engineering group, and the local government lacked relevant experience. Sonam Je visited other places to learn from successful renovations, such as the Potala Palace in Lhasa, and found huge differences between projects. "The Potala Palace used 'Aga soil', a traditional Tibetan construction material featuring a mixture of water, earth, rubble and butter," he explains. Labrang Monastery used a different material when it was first built, which created problems in the form of cracks on roofs and walls, although it prevents leaks better than many materials.

Just two days before *China Pictorial's* interview, Sonam met with engineers to discuss how to use the Aga soil in Labrang's renovation. Considering the huge differences in terms of natural conditions between the Potala Palace and Labrang Monastery such as altitude, climate, and sunlight, Sonam faces some difficult decisions. "Even the soil used in the renovation of the Potala Palace was modified. Now, we need to choose between improved traditional techniques and totally modified material."


Renovation of the six institutes, 20 badly-damaged Buddhist halls, and residences of Living Buddhas remain major cultural relic protection tasks. "We will finish all the preparatory work by the end of 2012, and the whole project will commence next April," predicted Sonam. The Cultural Relics Man-

agement Committee of the monastery has been in charge of regular repairs over recent years. Lamas from the committee insisted that for this renovation, they would make all-out efforts to recruit top-notch craftsmen. Stonemasons from Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, are known for their skill and experience, and have repaired the monastery in previous years. For carpenters, they looked to Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province. Skilled carpenters from that area are familiar with wooden structures in Labrang Monastery and can produce work on par with the lofty standards of the renovation. Timber used in the renovation must also be carefully selected. Currently, the monastery is searching for a suitable selection from forests all over the country.

Another problem remains. The maintenance and restoration of various Tibetan-style paintings and murals in the main halls of the monastery are still in the design

stage. It is not easy to find workers qualified to restore the art works.

"Also, we must take seasonal factors into consideration and large-scale religious activities must not be affected," adds Sonam. Three to four important religious activities are scheduled to take place in the Great Golden-tiled Hall, a major structure of the monastery, between the end of 2012 and early May 2013, and renovation should stop during these activities. When major structures are being repaired, religious observances will be inevitably affected. "We need to explain this to practitioners and reopen the structures as soon as repair work finishes."

It is estimated that the entire renovation project will last seven to eight years. "An ideal final result will please the monastery, practitioners, experts on cultural relic protection, and related scholars, which is quite a difficult task," smiles Sonam. "But we will try our best to reach this goal." 

A major part of the renovation project involves improving infrastructure. *by Wan Quan*



The Fight for the Right to Schooling

Text by Cheng Yu

It's been ten years since Zhan Haite began residing in Shanghai. She considers herself a Shanghai resident who should enjoy the right to attend a local high school; regulations disagree. On June 8, 2012, she launched a Weibo account to begin relating her tales of struggle.

Fifteen-year-old Zhan Haite soon attracted national attention by demanding admission to high school for residents of Beijing and Shanghai regardless of their registered hometowns.

Actually, Zhan wasn't the first person to question the policy. In mid-2012, the Chinese central government asked local authorities to brainstorm solutions and promulgate measures by the end of 2012.

The Dilemma

The problem is related to Chinese household registration system. Since China resumed its college entrance examination in 1977 after more than a decade of suspension, candidates have had to take the entrance exams in their registered hometowns. However, according to the sixth national population census in 2010, some 220 million Chinese residents live or work outside their hometowns, leading to schooling problems for the next generation, particularly when they must travel back to their hometowns to take entrance exams.

Over the last few years, the local governments have provided two possible resolutions: grant permission to certain non-registered candidates to participate in the exams and accept some as local residents through household re-registration.

In 2012, for instance, Shanghai allowed a certain number of non-native candidates to take their national college entrance exams if their parents met any of ten conditions, such as exceptional talent in their field, post-doctoral candidates in institutes of higher learning and research institutions, and "educated youth" – high school graduates who worked in poverty-stricken and border areas in support of the local culture and economy during the "cultural revolution" (1966-1976).

Zhan Haite's parents met none of the requirements. Even worse, the fact that she has a brother and a sister makes it even more impossible for her family to register

in Shanghai because they violated the one-child policy. According to current regulations, the municipal government grades applicants for household registration on seven factors including educational background, employment status, and income tax returns. For Zhan's family situation, the current process leaves no hope at all.

Born in 1997 in Zhuhai City, Guangdong Province, Zhan moved to Shanghai with her parents when she was four. She considers Shanghai her hometown since she grew up there. Her parents are natives of Jiangxi Province. She couldn't imagine living alone to attend school far away from her parents.

THE CHINESE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ASKED LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS AND PROMULGATE MEASURES BY THE END OF 2012.



Zhan's father has visited Shanghai's relevant department of municipal government but could never make any progress. Last May, Zhan dropped out of school because she couldn't attend the entrance exam for high school in Shanghai.

She first blamed her predicament on her parent's incompetence but soon realized from the internet that she was not alone with her sentiments and understood how hard the situation had become for so many.

She chose to stay in Shanghai, mak-



October 25, 2012: Zhan Haite (center) and a handful of other Shanghai transplants appeal for the right to attend school and fiercely debate permanent residents in front of the office of Shanghai Education Commission. CFP

ing a stand for equal rights to education. She has also self-taught her high school courses. She is the youngest activist to fight for such rights.

Open or Lock the Door?

“I was born in Zhuhai and thought myself a native of the city,” remarked Zhan Haite. “I didn’t consider myself a resident of Shanghai until middle school. Now, I am told that I’m not a citizen here and I must take the high school entrance exam in my hometown. If I stay in Shanghai, my only option is a vocational high school. I just don’t get it!”

On June 8, 2012, Zhan posted her first message on Weibo, which included a photo of herself holding a sign that asked, “Where is my right to the high school exam?”


On her blog on October 21, she re-

quested a debate in front of the office of the Shanghai Education Commission with Beijing and Shanghai citizens who oppose permission for nonresident students to take the college entrance exam. When Zhan and her parents arrived on the morning of the 25th, some Shanghai parents were already waiting, wearing masks printed “NO.”

Zhan became the public face of the issue. Cui, one of her opponents, initiated an offline group, known as League of Shanghai Guardians. “Our abundant educational resources are the result of generations of effort,” asserted Cui. “Therefore, priority should go to local candidates. Meanwhile, we also welcome outsiders who fit certain criteria.”

A recent survey shows that in China, 58 million children are left behind when their parents seek employment elsewhere, and 27 million children travel along with

their migrant working parents. Many of them wish to take the entrance exam in their adopted “hometown.” Their appeals have provoked strong objections, especially from residents of major municipalities such as Beijing and Shanghai, making the situation even more complicated for policy makers attempting to satisfy both sides: Is it possible to protect the interests of local candidates while admitting outsiders? Are schools big enough to accommodate an influx of non-local students? Who will pay for additional educational resources? How to regulate the migrant population in relation to the national college entrance exam in prevention of some from taking the advantage of the new policy?

Local governments have been striving to formulate an optimal solution, and the predicament is high on the agenda of Chinese authorities. 

Gateway to Abuja

Text by Chu Jiwang

In November 2009, I traveled to West Africa with a Chinese delegation to participate in the first China-Nigeria investment and trade forum held in Abuja, capital of Nigeria.

For foreign investors, Nigeria is a country full of opportunity and risk as well. The Niger River is the mother river of West Africa which gave birth to ancient West African culture. As one of Africa's most populous countries, Nigeria is called the "cradle of African culture." Nigeria also boasts rich natural resources yet to be developed. But at the same time, it is also a country with one of the poorest security situations in Africa. According to our guide, due to political instability and tribal and religious conflict, hijackings occur often, so the roads aren't very safe. Because of this, he warned us relentlessly not to go out alone, especially in the evening.

Even so, when asked which countries are the best in the world, Nigerians won't hesitate to reply that U.S.A. is the best, U.K. second and Nigeria third.

After the forum wrapped up, we hoped to visit some places of interest. Our guide sighed that there weren't many places worth seeing except mysterious Zuma Rock.

Our bus rolled over a vast plain, and we could see tropical grassland and continuous farmland extending beyond the horizon. With fertile soil and ample rainfall, the farmland looked ideal for planting crops. After a 40-minute drive, a huge bare rock crept past the horizon into the sky. The hill-like monolith was the legendary Zuma Rock.

The monolith is known for a façade carrying a human face. As we approached, we could make out the eyes, nose and even shiny forehead. A legend relates how the huge rock came to be: The ancient Greek god of sea, Poseidon, invited his elder


brother Zeus to dinner. The lobster he served was so delicious that when it was gone, Zeus sucked on three pebbles that were covered in juices after being used to roast the lobster. One pebble was used by Nigerians as the central marker of its borders, one was lost without a trace, and the third ended up as Zuma Rock.

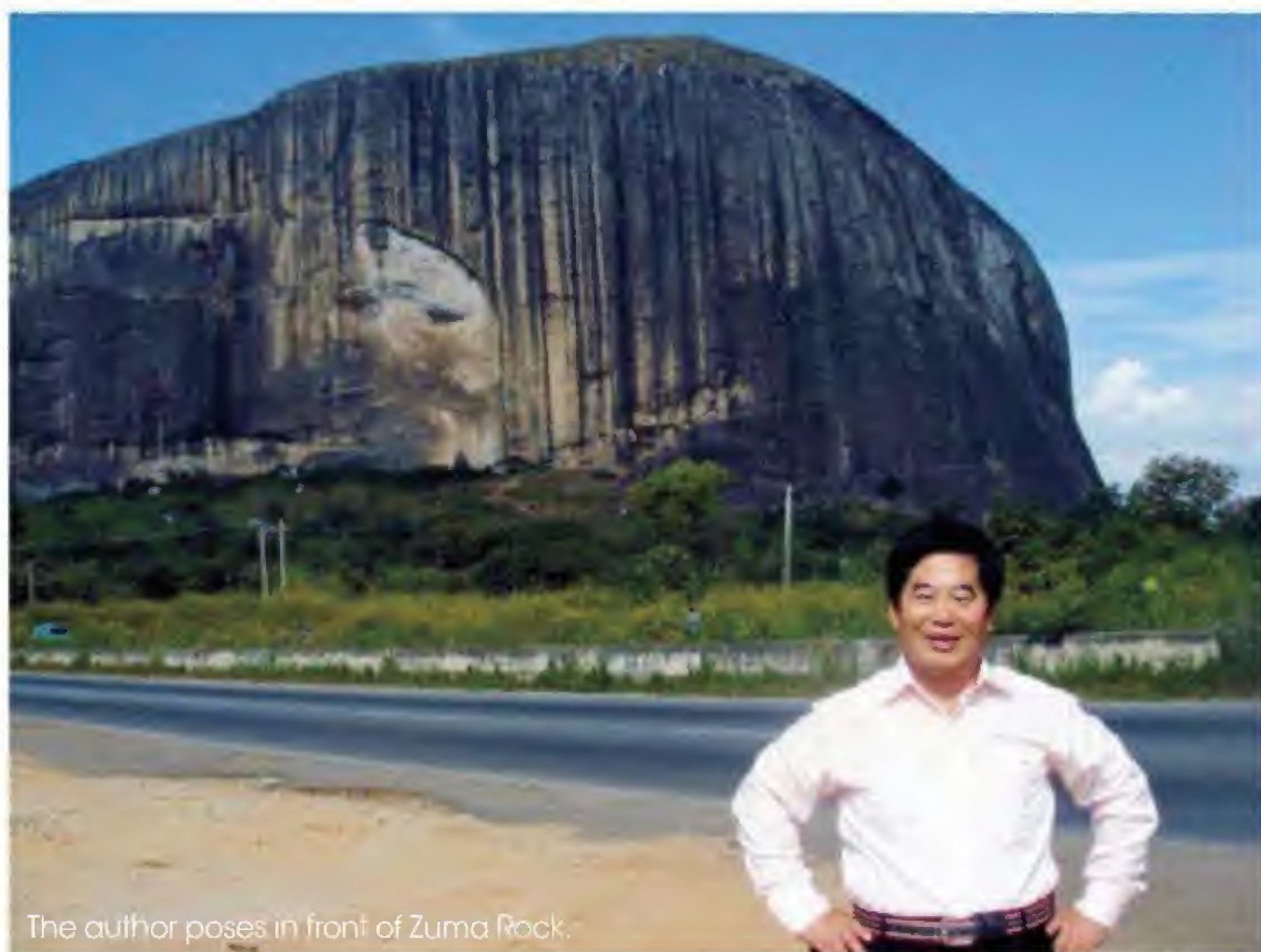
Situated next to a major highway connecting Kaduna with Abuja, the rock is called "Gateway to Abuja." Nigerians treasure it and regard it as a symbol of solidarity of their country. They believe that Zuma Rock guards the surrounding villages and their people against any invasion and bullying from outsiders. Therefore, the monolith is deemed a "treasure-guardian" by locals and is depicted on the 100 naira bill. Also, the exterior walls of the Nigeria Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai Expo were inspired by the rock.

As the bus pulled over, we disembarked to take photos. A luxurious build-

ing amidst overgrown weeds attracted my attention.

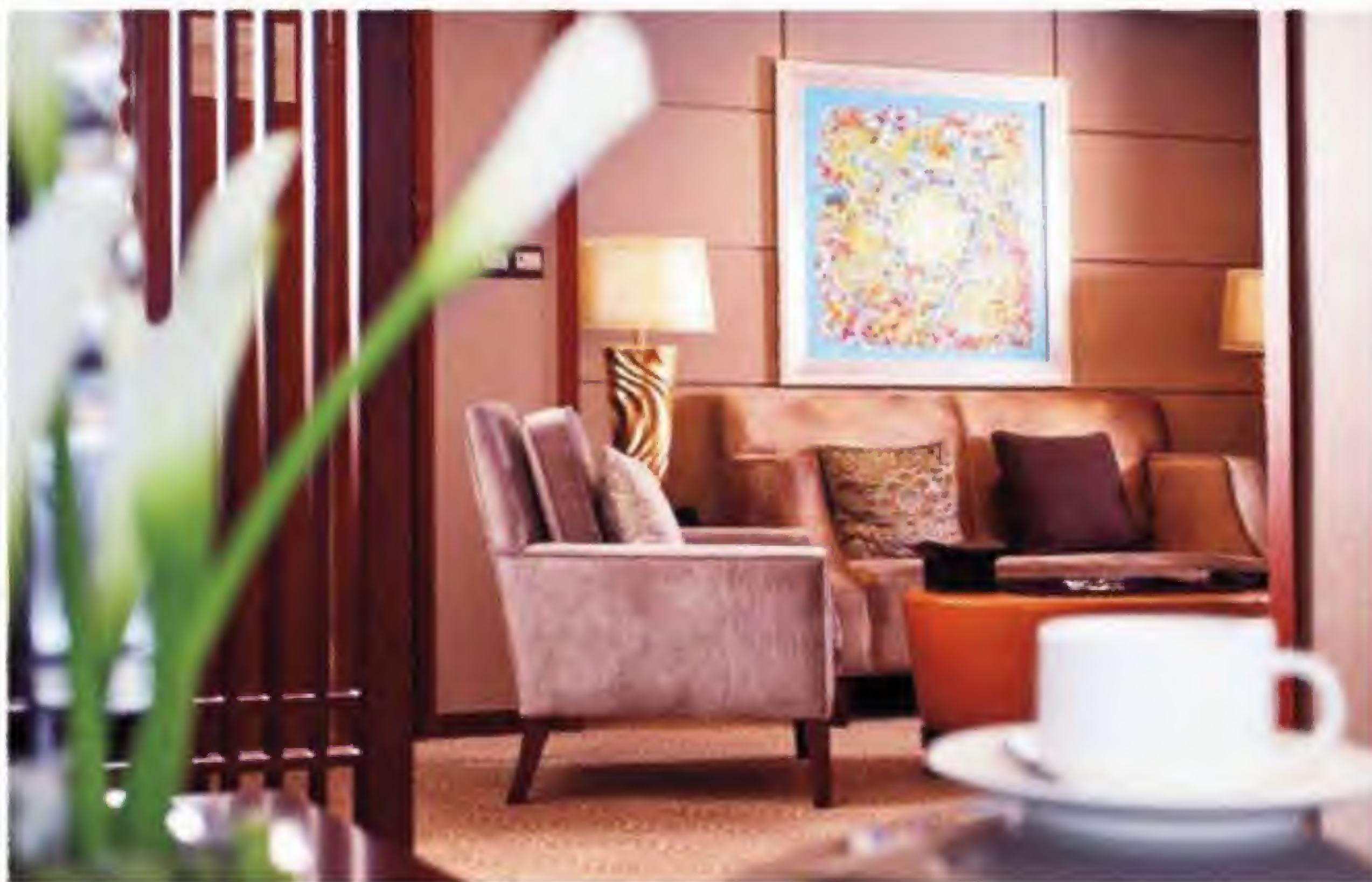
Our guide told us that it was once a luxurious hotel. Nigerians wanted to use it to accommodate tourists visiting the rock. Usually, a hotel built next to a well-known attraction – the most famous in the country in this case – would have welcomed many customers. So what on earth happened to this hotel? Locals declared that because the hotel faced the human face on the rock, it offended deities. While it was being built, several builders and engineers were accidentally killed. When it was finally completed and opened, several guests were found dead in their rooms. No one has dared stay in the hotel ever since. The owner abandoned it and the hotel was left deserted.

I'm not sure how much truth is in the legend, but the hotel I saw was truly abandoned and rotting. Only Zuma Rock remains standing firmly, silently witnessing every rise and fall across the land. 



The author poses in front of Zuma Rock.

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Life is Magnifique

An Online Harvest

Text by Ding Ge

Photos courtesy of Wang Xiaobang

“With an Internet Connection, My Store Opens”

Wang Zhiqiang, a farmer from Luliang mountainous area in northern China’s Shanxi Province, picked “Wang Xiaobang” as his screen name when opening his online shop, “Villager’s Best Stuff”, on China’s top online retailer Taobao. The reason he chose the name was simple: “Bang” means “help” in Chinese, and “Xiaobang” can mean “lend a hand.” “I wanted to invite city dwellers to try food produced in rural areas, and hoped to assist them in finding some in my village,” he recalled.

His honesty, simplicity, and hospitality quickly made his shop a favorite with customers, and his sales volume increased steadily. Gradually, Wang became wealthy through the internet, a phenomenon his fellow villagers had never seen before.

During the 2008 Spring Festival, Wang wrote an article about his experience titled *Computer, Internet Connection, Camera, and Motorcycle: I Am An Online Entrepreneur* and posted it online. The article was

quickly republished on many websites, and won Wang the First Taobao Entrepreneurial Pioneering Award. Since then, Wang has been a media darling.

While Wang and his local grain shop were gaining popularity, his decision to diversify and add a wider range of products brought a sharp increase in his shop’s sales volume. At present, more than 60 varieties of products can be found in Wang’s shop, including locally produced grains, agricultural products and handmade specialties. During the busy season, Wang pays an average of 1,000 yuan a day just for shipping at the post office. Annually, shipping costs him around 300,000 yuan. In a normal year, he sells 30 tons of millet, 10 tons of soy beans, 20,000 kilograms of walnuts, and 20 tons of Chinese red dates, with annual sales volume reaching nearly three million yuan.

Presently, Wang is considering expanding the capacity and scale of his grain business, and he hopes to “lend a hand” to his fellow villagers seeking wealth.

Wealth from Soil

Wang lives in Zhangjiagou Village of Linxian County. His home, a three-room cave dwelling on a flat land, is where he operates his online shop, “Villager’s Best Stuff.” Years ago, Wang worked in Beijing as a migrant worker. During that time, he noticed that people were buying and selling things on the internet, making money from home. He gave it a try and opened his own shop on Taobao, with the intention of selling his old books that had been sitting on shelves for ages. But after selling the few books he found, he began to ponder his next move. “I thought hard, very hard,” he recalls. “One day, the proverb ‘those living on a mountain live off the mountain’ hit me like a bolt of lightning. I am a farmer, and I can sell the natural products from the soil: Chinese red dates, millet, walnuts, and soy beans.”

Excited by his revelation, Wang started right away. He borrowed a camera from his neighbor, took photos of the products, and made descriptions one by one.



Local specialties such as corn and wild jujubes from Wang’s hometown have seen high demand from city dwellers.

"I saw descriptions for similar products online," Wang explains. "Most of them only describe specifications, size, and basic features. I thought I should try something different. Emotion matters. I sell the same food that was consumed by my father and forefathers."

In August 2008, Wang's shop opened. "I earned four yuan from my first deal," he smiles. "I went to the county seat, spent two yuan on a butterfly-shaped hair pin for my wife and cookies for my daughter. I was so happy to see real money. I could feel the whole business was going to work out. It was my first nugget of gold from online business."

After operation began, many problems appeared. Wang was quickly consumed with improving his product package, settling accounts with the post office, and shipping faster. Soon, he had sold all the grain in his house as well as that of his relatives, so he began to sell grain from other households in the village. "Everyday, I rode my motorcycle to the county seat post office to ship the goods, even if the weather was terrible or I only got one order."

Sometimes, the money earned from a single sale couldn't even cover the fuel for his motorcycle. But Wang's persistence eventually paid off. By the end of 2008, he was receiving an average of 10 orders a day. "I could earn around 100 yuan daily then, and became self-sufficient. Not to mention, I could help my fellow villagers earn more from their grain, which enabled them to lead a much better lifestyle than working as a migrant in a metropolis."

"The Food My Forefathers Ate"

In the early days, Wang's store primarily sold Chinese red dates, millet, and walnuts. Later, he began to sell a wider variety of foods with distinct local features such




The internet brought Wang more prosperity than he could have ever imagined.

as soy beans, which city dwellers like to turn into soy milk and drink for breakfast. He also sold some specialty foods that are now hard to find even in rural areas, such as dried shredded turnips, dried shredded summer squash, and homemade pickled wild vegetables.

Wang recalled that during his childhood summers, when squash was abundant, every household in the village shredded squash with a handmade tool and dried it in the sun. From winter until the following March, when vegetables were scarce, dried shredded summer squash was always found on the dinner table. It was used in soup, meat stew, and combined with other vegetables. The tool used to shred the squash was made especially for that task. Nowadays, only families that have been living in cave-dwellings on mountains for ages could possibly still have the tool, but he tracked one down. As soon as he posted dried shredded summer squash online, orders quickly exceeded his supply. "A large restaurant in town made a huge order, but I

didn't even have enough for the customers of my store!" he exclaims. "And my mom's handmade chili sauce is also popular. The 60 varieties of food in store are all things me and my forefathers used to eat."

Before opening his store, Wang and his wife worked in Beijing for six years in construction, sales, and as drivers. "We earned a little money, and when we returned home, I decided we ought to buy a computer, which could connect us to the whole world," he recalls. Now, living and working in his hometown, Wang feels content more than he ever has before.

"Now, even the grain from neighboring villages falls short of demand," he gasps. "I already travel to further away places – villages along the Yellow River – to purchase locally produced food. And I am thinking of applying for a grant from the county government to build an ecological garden. By doing this, I can work with local farmers to plant more of the crops I need, offer better products for my clients, and help my fellow villagers earn greater wealth." 

Fond Farewells

Text and photographs by Wang Honglian

From 1958 to 1978, more than 200,000 residents of Xichuan County, Henan Province, relocated to other areas such as Qinghai and Hubei provinces to make way for construction of the Danjiangkou Reservoir, part of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project. In 2009, another 160,000 people resettled in other parts of Henan Province after groundbreaking of the middle-leg of the Project. Ultimately, about 400,000 joined the exodus from Xichuan County. These pictures were shot between 2010 and 2011, as the few remaining residents said a final goodbye to their homeland.

Photographer Wang Honglian was born in Xichuan, Henan Province. He is a member of China Folklore Photographic Association and Henan Photographers' Association. Wang shot more than 30,000 pictures of resettlement and relocation to make way for the South-to-North Water Diversion Project.





Villagers pose for pictures in front of their houses on Chinese New Year's Eve.





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1. August 7, 2011: Wu Tingyan and his family bid farewell to their ancestral graves.
2. August 7, 2010: Villagers demolish their former dwellings before leaving.
3. August 4, 2011: Kou Guorong and his family gather for a final dinner in their house.





1. July 20, 2010: With his mother in his arms, a resident is ready to leave.

2. October 24, 2011: Saying goodbye still isn't easy at a farewell ceremony for departing students of Jinyuan Community Elementary School.

3. July 20, 2010: One resident takes a sapling along to his new home.

4. June 16, 2011: Liu Rongwa, 83 years old, prepares to move.

5. June 9, 2011: Children help load plants from their home onto a truck before leaving.



June 30, 2011: Bidding farewell to their families at a Cangfang Town ferry.





As Exquisite as Porcelain

Text by Wu Zhen

For many, the most alluring piece of a city is its older streets soaked in the strongest local flavor. The greater vintage orthodoxy the street preserves, the more mesmerizing it becomes for visitors. Ancient Ciqikou stands out as a miniature version of old Chongqing, a major Chinese municipality known as “mountain city.”

Ciqikou lies on the Jialing River in northeastern Shapingba District, 14 kilometers west of downtown Chongqing.

Initially named Longyin Town, it was built during the Xianping reign (998-1003) of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The town had become a bustling port by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). A local ballad recounts its prosperity at that time: “A thousand merchants greet each other in the daytime, while ten thousands lanterns light up the sky at night.”

The city’s porcelain industry grew so strong that the town was eventually renamed after it — Ciqikou translates

literally to “porcelain mouth.” Early in the 20th Century, local merchants embraced cutting-edge techniques and jointly established Sichuan Porcelain Factory. Its exquisite and diverse products sold well both in Sichuan Province and beyond. In its heydays, the town was packed with more than 70 porcelain factories, and countless cargo vessels squeezed into its wharfs, injecting vitality into the local economy.

Most buildings still standing in the town retain architectural styles of the Ming



The ancient town of Ciqikou is considered a miniature version of old Chongqing. CFP

and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Its main street is paved with stone slabs and lined with shops. At its entrance, Zhong's Compound combines architectural elements of quadrangle residences of both northern and southern China. It was constructed 120 years ago by Zhong Yunting, who served as an officer under Empress Dowager Cixi of the Qing Dynasty. All its structures are situated symmetrically along the central axis of its spacious courtyard, a typical feature of northern quadrangles. Meanwhile,



A famous snack in Ciqikou, Chen's fried dough twists, crispy and delicious, are popular with tourists. CFP

the exquisite black tiles and tenon frames reflect traditional architectural styles unique to southern China.

One seeking insight into local lifestyles never misses the local cuisine. Even during tourist off-season, thousands of visitors perpetually flood the town each day. Its most legendary foods include peanuts with salt and pepper, thin sheets of bean curd, and sautéed eel with duck blood curd, which are collectively called "three treasures of the ancient town." Other popular snacks include sliced beef and variety meats in chili sauce, chicken giblets, jellied bean curd with river water, cold been jelly, cold noodles, and hot and sour rice noodles.


Most visitors to Ciqikou will take home a pack of Chen's fried dough twists, even though they may have to wait in a long queue to buy them. Others buy fried crab or crustaceans and munch on them while strolling around town. At dinner-time, all roadside restaurants specializing in chicken giblets or sliced beef and variety meats in chili sauce are packed with diners seeking authentic local cuisine.

The cooking methods, as well as the stories behind them, are saturated with strong folk flavor. Perhaps this feature enhances the locale's popularity with visitors.

Teahouses can be found all over the

millennium-old town. In the past, sailors, gangsters, officials, and the unemployed often killed time in teahouses — where high-class and low coexisted harmoniously. During World War II, Chongqing served as an auxiliary capital, and more than 100 teahouses popped up during the era. They also served as performance venues, where customers could enjoy folk art performances, such as storytelling, while sipping tea.


Ciqikou is also noted for its unique dragon dance, popularly called "playing fire dragon" by locals. Before Spring Festival, local artists paste thick paper or gauze over a bamboo frame constructed in the shape of a dragon's body, soak it in rice water, and finally draw scales on it. The dragon's body includes several sections, which will vary depending on the size of the performance. One performer is required for each section.

After decades of silence, ancient Ciqikou has again become as prosperous and bustling as its heydays. However, locals are starting to miss their formerly tranquil, laid-back lifestyles when navigating the noisy streets. Some even fear that local traditional culture and leisurely lifestyles will be swept away with the never-ending waves of visitors. 

Hiking the Roof of the World

Text by Wu Xia

Yarlung Zangbo Great Canyon, one of the deepest in the world, fosters the most diverse mountainous vertical vegetation in China. *CFP*



Last October, I spent two days hiking through a 26-kilometer section of Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon, the highlight of the canyon trek route, with the Outdoor Association of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Beautiful Snow Mountain

As we crept over Segrila Pass at 4,700 meters above sea level, someone in our Jeep shouted, “The mountain at two o’clock is Namcha Barwa Peak!”

The Jeep parked at Baifengtai Pass where we would begin our trek.

At first, I didn’t mind the dizziness caused by the altitude’s thin air, nor did I slow my pace. I threw a lump of chocolate in my mouth and kept going, but walking became increasingly difficult. Soon, I couldn’t even hear the wind over the thunderous thumping of my own heart. In the distance, layer upon layer of navy blue mountains extended as far as the eye could see, with the white rapids of Yarlung Zangbo River snaking through them. However, I was in no mood to appreciate the scenery. I could only see and feel the

road under my feet stretching endlessly before me.

After crossing a mountain pass, we discovered a tranquil lake sparkling light bluish green across its 50-meter-wide surface. Before we could reach it, icy balls of hail suddenly began falling from the sky, and the lake’s peacefulness disappeared. I pulled down the visor of my hat, lowered my head and inched forward carefully. As soon as I became comfortable walking that way, I found myself bathed in warm sunlight — all within 15 minutes. I looked back and found the lake once again as peaceful as before.

When dusk approached and the sun dipped behind the mountains, the roar of Yarlung Zangbo River became louder and more distinct. The mountain road became harder to hike since more and more fallen trees blocked the path.

We didn’t reach our campsite until 10 o’clock in the evening. Stars twinkled above as we sat around the warm campfire, and I used my last ounces of strength to timidly sip some hot soup. All I felt like doing was stumbling into the tent to pass out.



Hikers from the Outdoor Association of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Searching for Mushrooms

I woke to strange noises early the next morning. Apparently a yak decided to graze right next to our tent. I quickly jumped up and dressed. The canyon's morning air was fresh, and the obscure features of Namcha Barwa covered in a "golden veil" seemed to urge our journey on.

According to the schedule, we would depart from Triba Village and reach Darlin Village that day. This leg was the easiest of our trip. We passed a forest with sporadically arranged beechwood, Chinese pines, bamboo groves, wild walnut trees and other lush greenery. The air was brimming with oxygen and the ground felt even, soft and resilient, due to so many layers of rotting leaves.

Rotting wood along the way was covered with green fluffy sunflower, fragile lichen that can only survive in areas with zero air pollution. Its presence can be

regarded as a sort of ecological "quality label." They also enhance the environment for mushrooms and other fungus. "It's too late in the year now, but if you come in August or September, you will find tricholoma matsutake here," our guide Tashi Tsering noted.

As soon as the words left his mouth, Tashi dug up a mushroom from the root of a large tree and handed it to me. "This is Qinggang mushroom," he revealed, pointing to its light brown canopy as big as half of my hand. "If you came in June or July, you could gather morchella conica. I heard that morchella conica dishes in Beijing restaurants cost as much as 200 or 300 yuan each."

A Hunter's Home

The noon sun was scalding the plateau. My canteen was bone dry by the time we reached Gyalha Village. A local named

Rinqinciring, led us into his house accented by a green lawn and blooming bright yellow dahlias. The two two-story stone buildings were painted white, and each corner of walls and eaves were decorated with intricate and elegant Tibetan patterns. The first floor lacked many furnishings. A wooden staircase led to the second, where the primary living quarters of the family were located: a large living room and two bedrooms. The living room, which doubled as the kitchen, featured a square copper stove in the middle, in which glowing coal burned briskly. The black smoke-stained fireplace was also adorned with elegantly-carved patterns.

Rinqinciring dug up a lump of black smoked pork from the top of the kitchen range and put it in my hand with chopsticks. It was so hot that I kept blowing on it, but my host just wandered off to prepare butter tea. His wife, Drolma, remained

Tips

Located in Nyingchi and Medog counties in Nyingchi Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon stretches over 500 kilometers. Its ample rainfall and moderate temperatures provide advantageous conditions for vertical distribution of plants. About 60 to 70 percent of the species found on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau are concentrated in the canyon area.


The best hiking season is early June to mid-October. On the trail, hikers can appreciate snow-capped mountains and hidden villages preserving mysterious Tibetan culture. However, be careful of high altitude conditions and low oxygen. When first arriving, avoid strenuous activities, walk slowly and talk quietly to reduce possible adverse effects. Some suggest that hikers take *rhodiola rosea* three to five days before the journey, which will help adaptation to low oxygen conditions.



Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon Hiking Map.

busy at the stove. Large bunches of red peppers hung around her, which seemed highly convenient for the cook to grab while preparing dishes. Peppers are a local favorite, and they're added to virtually every dish.

In their utility room, I discovered rabbit fur resting on a wooden frame. Drolma explained to me that Rinqinciring was formerly a hunter known far and wide in the Yarlung Zangbo River area, and his prey included bears, deer, rabbits and a few other animals. When he went hunting, he would leave home for more than 20 days and walk more than 100 kilometers through the mountains. Later, as the wild animal population decreased and policies were implemented to protect them, Rinqinciring became an "Anjila," a doctor of traditional Tibetan medicine.

Before leaving, Rinqinciring and I agreed to meet again so he could share stories of hunting in the forest along the Yarlung Zangbo River. 



Doctor Rinqinciring was once a hunter known far and wide in the Yarlung Zangbo area.



Living Elsewhere: Twenty Portraits of Ordinary People

by Yan Lizhong

Published by the Chinese Overseas Publishing House, May 2012

Yan Lizhong is a journalist with China's *Life* magazine. This book is based on his experiences as a reporter over the past decade, in which he developed a method of depicting ordinary people and their lives from singular perspectives. His 20 subjects for the book include a cook, a delivery boy, a street singer, a miner, an AIDS volunteer, a prison guard, a private collector, a foster parent for left-behind children, a dramatic actor, a reform school teacher, an environment activist, a resident of a landmine-ridden village, a retired world champion weightlifter, a cyclist who circled the world, a forest ranger, a rural doctor, a retired soldier, a porcelain painter, a tomb guard, and a railroad maintenance worker. Critics have commented that the silent voices and lonely faces depicted in Yan's book showcase some overlooked pieces of glistening China and the fast-changing era.

Yu Caiyun, a painter of white-and-blue porcelain from Jingdezhen, a city known as "Porcelain Capital of China."

At 16, she began to learn painting at Guyao Porcelain Plant. Her work is characterized by simple outlines but profound meaning. Many of her works have been purchased by museums and private collectors. *by Peng Hui*





A Broken Family: The Desperate Relation between a Father and His Son from Chinese Mainland to Taiwan

by Liang Xuan

Published by Guangxi Normal University Press, March 2012

This book recounts stories about a broken family separated by the Taiwan Straits, as well as the author's personal life. The author led a life full of frustration: He was abandoned by his parents, became a monk when he was young, skipped school, became a thief, fought with his father, and ran away from home. The author also describes how his father didn't show at his wedding, took over National Taiwan University, and participated in campaigns to defend China's Diaoyu Islands. The book also illustrates how the author reunited with his mother across the Taiwan Straits after four decades of separation. The stories of the broken family reflect the beginning and end of a drifting era. Instead of important historic events, the book focuses on stories from ordinary life on China's mainland and Taiwan Province.

Liang Xuan, born Ma Guoguang, is a famous writer in Taiwan. He was born in the Beibei District of Chongqing on October 10, 1942, and moved to Taiwan when he was five years old. He received a master's degree in television and radio at Brooklyn College, City University of New York,

and worked as a radio and television anchor and producer. His father, Ma Ting-Ying, was a prestigious paleontologist, marine geologist and biologist, as well as a pioneer of China's marine geology research.



The Evolution of Modern Chinese Society

by Chen Xulu

Published by China Renmin University Press, June 2012

Basically speaking, modern Chinese society combines tradition and innovation in the process of its evolution. This also explains its complexity. *The Evolution of Modern Chinese Society* (illustrated version) not only reviews the economic and political reforms of contemporary China, but also analyzes China's changes in social structure due to external influence, thus painting a comprehensive picture of the evolution and reform of modern China. This book has been hailed as one of the best publications about contemporary China.

Chen Xulu (1918-1988), a native of Xiangxiang County (today's Shuangfeng), Hunan Province, was an internationally renowned Chinese historian. He served as a professor at the Department of History of East China Normal University. He devoted his entire life to researching the history of modern China. Many of his books have been translated into Russian, English, and Japanese.



A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture

by Wu Hung (U.S.A.)

Translated by Xiao Tie

Published by Shanghai People's Publishing House, November 2012

In the 1990s, why did so many Chinese artists show great interest in recording demolished houses and decaying industrial sites through a broad variety of media, including photography, installation, performance art, and cinema?

The answer is sought in *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture*. This richly illustrated book focuses on China's "ruin culture" and related images, and examines the evolution of Chinese artis-

tic practices from ancient times through the present across a wide range of art forms including painting, architecture, photography, print, and cinema, in hopes of revealing the connection between traditional Chinese art and modern visual culture. The book consists of three parts: The first addresses the "relic" concept in Chinese culture and its visual manifestations, the second focuses on China's "ruin culture" from the 19th Century to the early 20th Century, especially the ruins of war, and the final part depicts images of ruins from the second half of the 20th Century to the present.

Author Wu Hung studied at the Department of Art History of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. In the 1980s, he studied in the United States and received a double doctorate in art history and anthropology from Harvard University. Later, he served on the teaching staff of the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard, and received tenure in 1994. In 2008, he was honored with the Distinguished Teaching of Art History Award at the annual conference of the College Art Association. Now he is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Science.



Seed (1947), an oil painting by Huang Xinbo (1915-1980). In the painting, morning twilight breaks through the dark horizon, which symbolizes hope reborn from the ruins of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

A BITE OF THE WEST

Text by Su Yuan

Western food was not introduced to China until the mid-17th Century, when missionaries from the West began widely proselytizing in the Orient. Some missionaries brought along their native foods and even cooks, while others instructed Chinese cooks how to prepare food according to their native culinary arts. Western cuisine soon attracted interest in China, specifically amongst the ruling class. Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722), for example, paid special attention to Western food as missionaries introduced him to more and more about the West. Along with increased communication between Qing Dynasty officials and Western missionaries, some simple Western dishes began to appear on dinner tables of high-class homes. Even so, the influence of Western cuisine on Chinese dining culture back then was no comparison to its impact today. In Guangzhou, China's first port open to foreign trade, the Westerners seen "cutting semi-cooked meat with a sword" were considered coarse and primitive in the eyes of locals.

After Shanghai was opened as a foreign trade port, Western food found its way to China's eastern and northern regions, and gained popularity with more Chinese people. In 1866, the fifth year of Emperor Tongzhi's reign, Shanghai published a book, *Foreign Cookery*, compiled by Martha Foster Crawford, wife of American missionary Tarleton Perry Crawford. The cookbook was originally aimed at expats, but as Western cuisine gained steam in

China, several more editions were printed to meet the demands of Chinese cooks. It included more than 100 Western recipes as well as an explicit introduction to desserts.

Back in the 19th-Century, dining at a Western restaurant was considered luxurious consumption. At the time, a meal at The Best Fragrance, a famous Western restaurant in Shanghai, would cost about 40 times the price of a decent Chinese meal. Thus, Western restaurants were primarily patronized by elites and dignitaries, as described in a poem: "Strange foods with exotic flavors puzzle the customers of Western eateries, where foreign visitors are outnumbered by high-ranking officials coming day after day."

Beijing's dining scene also embraced the arrival of Western food. After the 1911 Revolution, greater numbers of Western restaurants sprang up across the city and accommodated waves of patrons. Eating Western food gradually became a popular way of socializing. To cater to common citizens who could barely afford authentic Western restaurants, some Chinese restaurants developed dishes modified to suit Chinese palates. In his *Collection of Culinary Essays*, prominent writer Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987) recounted a meal with his father at Zhongxing Teahouse in Beijing's Dong'an Market when he was a child. The teahouse manager enthusiastically recommended their steak to Liang's father, pleading, "Please give it a try. It's inexpensive, yet as tasty as the steak they serve at Six-Nation Hotel."

The Six-Nation Hotel, officially known as Grand Hotel des Wagon-Lits, is the fruit of a 1905 joint venture between six nations: Britain, France, United States, Germany, Japan, and Russia. A renowned Western-style commercial mecca at the time, it was located at the former Foreign Legation Quarter in Dongjiaominxiang. Ambassadors, diplomatic envoys, officials, and upper-class elites from a plethora of countries patronized its accommodations, food, and recreation, making it a frequent social destination for local heavyweights. In between the clinking of wine glasses, the hotel also witnessed some earthshaking events, including the assassination of Zhang Zhenwu, one of the leaders of the Wuchang Uprising which sparked the 1911 Revolution, plotted by Yuan Shikai, then President of the Republic of China, and Vice President Li Yuanhong.

In the preface to *Gormandizer's Literary Notes*, renowned scholar Zhu Jiajin (1914-2003) wrote that Western food in Old Beijing mainly fell into British, French, Russian, and German cuisines, and the most authentic British and French dishes were found at Grand Hotel des Wagon-Lits and Beijing Hotel, where chefs refused to yield to Chinese tastes. As one of the top hotels in Beijing, Grand Hotel des Wagon-Lits introduced Beijing residents to not only Western bread, coffee, and steak, but also comprehensive dining etiquette such as napkin manners, the use of utensils, and avoiding making noise. The gentleman's rule of "ladies first" was also introduced to




Moscow Restaurant, 1993. Commonly called "Lao Mo" by Beijingers, the Russian restaurant has been a popular dining destination since its establishment in 1954. *Xinhua*

China through the hotel.

After 1949, Grand Hotel des Wagon-Lits declined, and its once dominant position was seized by Moscow Restaurant, commonly called "Lao Mo" by Beijingers, which opened in 1954. The popularity of the Russian restaurant was undoubtedly closely associated with the change in political ecology at the time. In the decades prior to

China's reform and opening-up, the chance to dine at Lao Mo was seen as a source of pride in the eyes of Beijing youth. Especially for children of high-ranking officials, dining there was sort of a ritual pilgrimage, rather than a simple meal. Lao Mo also hosted many grand banquets offered by state leaders to important foreign guests.

According to rough data, Western food

could be found on Chinese tables at least 200 years ago. Over the last two centuries, Western food in the East has seen ups and downs, but has always remained a niche product, far removed from the tastes of the vast majority of Chinese people. Blame may not lie with Western cuisine itself, but more likely in cultural differences between China and the West. 



A work of Wang Xieda.

New York

Subject Verb Object (Wang Xieda solo exhibition)

January 10 – February 9, 2013
James Cohan Gallery (New York)

Wang Xieda's sculptures range in material from cast bronze to paper pulp. Born in 1968 and now a resident of Shanghai, Wang has spent the past 20 years studying the history of Chinese written language, specifically focusing on Chinese calligraphy from the Fourth Century, the period in which the brush began being used instead of carving characters on wood, bamboo, or stone. Chinese writing evolved through the development of pictographs (depicting objects) and ideographs (representing abstract notions). Wang celebrates writing styles of Chinese characters through depicting them with Western sculpture techniques.



A work of Yue Minjun. CFP

Paris

Yue Minjun, L'Ombre du fou rire

November 14, 2012 – March 17, 2013

Foundation Cartier for Contemporary Art (Paris)

Yue Minjun is one of China's most representative and famous contemporary artists. His paintings of laughing figures have become iconic images in contemporary Chinese art as well as embodiments of the spirit of today's Chinese people. Featuring nearly 40 paintings gathered from collections around the world, the exhibition also displays a wide array of drawings that have never before been publicly displayed.

Shanghai

Tian Wei & Qiu Jie – Joint Exhibition

December 22, 2012 – February 16, 2013

The Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai

Though their perspectives and styles contrast each other, Chinese artists Tian Wei and Qiu Jie, who have lived overseas for an extended period, reveal similarly profound insight in their work. Tian Wei started learning calligraphy at a young age. After living in America for so many years, he combined oil painting and ink by drawing Western words with techniques of Chinese calligraphy. Qiu Jie endeavors to string together idea fragments such as an individual dream, a past memory and a live object. All of these make his work realistic yet surrealistic at the same time.



A work of Tian Wei.



A work of Wang Huaqing.

Beijing

Experiment in Chinese Contemporary Art (First Round Exhibition)

January 6 – February 26, 2013

Today Art Museum

The exhibition invited four artists, Wang Huaqing, Sui Jianguo, Zhong Biao and Chen Wenling, to explore the same theme. In fact, the exhibition itself is an experiment. Along with finished works, also on display are documents and videos demonstrating the thinking process of the artists during creation and exploring the connection between the artists' concrete product and abstract consciousness.



A work of Qiu Jie.



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